



RESEARCH PAPER

**Exploring the Causes of English Language Speaking Anxiety among
Secondary School Students**

Mariyam Rehan

Senior Lecturer, Department of Communication and Languages, Institute of Business Management (IoBM), Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan

***Corresponding Author:** mariyam.rehan16@outlook.com

Abstract

This research has investigated the causes of English language speaking anxiety among secondary school students. For the collection of data students were selected from secondary level studying at Army Public School Mehfooz Shaheed Garrison, Lahore. A mixed-method approach was utilized by a questionnaire with 25 items, to gather data on the students' perceptions about speaking anxiety. To observe teachers' perceptions about speaking anxiety among students the interviews were taken. For statistical analysis of the questionnaires, SPSS (version 21) has been used. The results showed that students and teachers both are responsible for the cause of speaking anxiety. Students face anxiety because of their personal reasons and teaching methods. The teachers should develop smart teaching techniques for their students, which will help them in eradicating the anxiety. The findings of this study can also aid teachers and students in changing their approaches towards language teaching and learning, respectively.

Key Words Confidence, Pedagogical Implications, Secondary Level, Speaking Anxiety

Introduction

Over the last ten years of span anxiety of speaking English is one of the major discussions taking place in the world. Anxiety seems to have a detrimental impact on language learning. Anxiety has been divided into several types and speaking language anxiety is distinct from the rest of the types. Language learning anxiety is "situation-specific" (MacIntyre and Gardner 1991b; Horwitz 2001). And this type of anxiety occurs often in language learning environments, such as classrooms. Speaking anxiety hinders the performance of the learners and not only EFL students but ESL students also face speaking anxiety.

The rapid globalization of the English language has raised the need for enhancing and developing communication skills. Throughout the world, people learn English for a number of purposes, the most important of which is to be able to converse with the other person in a language which is not their vernacular or natal language. However, not only in everyday life but also in official correspondence, the use of English has become a prerequisite. Learners of the English language feel stress, uneasiness, or anxiety when they are trying to speak English and they tend to have a "mental block". English is the most broadly used language because of the fact that it is used eighty percent on the internet and in print journalism, with literature published in English-language in over 60 countries.

Here in Pakistan, English is taken as a compulsory subject from primary to tertiary level and official documents are majorly written in English for which this language enjoys the glory of being highly significant. Moreover, English is used as a second language in Pakistan and most of the educated people speak and write English as a second language. The fact is if you do not speak fluently, you will be judged by the people for not speaking correctly. This makes the people get self-conscious and they

suffer speech anxiety while communicating in English. Despite the presence of English medium schools and trained teachers the students face English language speaking anxiety.

Speaking Anxiety

For many students today, speaking can be a daunting problem because it necessitates conversation. The other four abilities can be mastered alone, but students cannot really talk individually, so they have to make every attempt to meet someone with whom they have to converse. Nunan (2000) agrees that one of the truly crucial and common attributes of acquiring a second or foreign language is speaking. He also points out that the capability to carry on a debate in the second language is a key indicator of language learning progress. It is the biggest problem for students to speak in English. Consequently, they lose their confidence to speak without making mistakes. It becomes stressful for them to speak the English language until they achieve fluency (Bookit, 2010). Lack of vocabulary, inappropriate and unacceptable grammatical structures, and fear of producing errors are a few causes that may lead to speech glitches and trigger an intense sense of apprehension as soon as it comes to speaking. According to Thornburry (2005) language anxiety affects not only young learners but also students studying at the university level face anxiety and eventually struggle with English.

Literature Review

Speaking is the most essential and effective formulation of human communication. Students give their best and work hard to strengthen their communicative skills in different ways. As reported by research, speaking is the most important ability in every language since it is needed for successful communication (Zaremba, 2006). Reading, writing, and listening are the other macro capabilities that are dominated by speaking.

English is used in Indo- Pakistan subcontinent when the Britishers came here in the 16th century. Our national heroes before the time of the partition tried their best to convince Muslims to learn English. As they could see English as the future of the world. And from that time people have been using English as their second language.

The growing need for global contact has elevated English to the status of a communication language. "The ever-growing need for a good communication skill in the English language has created a huge worldwide demand for achieving a good demand of English among its non-native speakers around the globe" (Mehmoodzadeh, 2012, p. 466).

Speaking Anxiety among Language Learners

According to Awan et al., (2010), it has been challenging for the students in Pakistan to learn in a class that is teacher centered because the teachers have a complete control over the class and the students' views are not considered frequently. This gives little chance to the learners to practice speaking. Many students were asked to speak English and they face difficulty in speaking and were anxious. Öztürk (2009) performed a study on 383 Turkish students and found by conducting interviews that they felt way too anxious when they speak English in front of others

Ahmed et al., (2017) operated a survey research on the students of Balochistan University and it was observed that the students faced anxiety and the major reason found was the inter-language meaning system.

Salehi and Marefat (2014) have studied the effects of foreign language and test anxiety on the performance of the students. The results showed that both language and test anxiety had statistically negative correlation. Therefore, teachers were recommended to overcome the classroom anxiety for improving the performance of the students.

Waseem and Jibeen (2013) examined the relationship of motivation and anxiety of English language learning in Pakistani students studying at COMSATS. It was shown that an elevated level of motivation was shown in the situations where there was a prerequisite for progress and economic benefits for the students.

Horwitz (2001) introduced a "psychological dimension" to language anxiety, stating that "it is a factor that has a negative impact on the psychology of learners" (p. 114). When a timid and shy student who fears to speak in front of others, is asked to make a brief speech in front of the entire class, for example, he or she will feel anxious. Students who are nervous will not be able to pass vocal challenges because their anxiety prevents them from performing well (Yan & Horwitz, 2008). Easygoing students without the stress of speaking English, on the other hand, would perform better because they are not hindered by language anxiety (Woodrow, 2006). Anxiety has been identified as a concerning factor that has a debilitating effect on student performance in the classroom. Disproportionate anxiety can cause physical disorders such as "shallow breathing and/or hyper-ventilation, an intense rush of adrenaline and other stress hormones, pounding heartbeats, heart palpitations, sweating, shaking limbs and trembling body and muscle tension, a dry mouth, headaches, nausea, diarrhea, and/or vomiting." And he has said that "anxiety is defined as a state of intense agitation, foreboding, tension, and dread, occurring from a real or perceived threat of impending danger" (Mayer, 2008).

Anxiety is a threatening mental state characterized by apprehension and stress (Ozturk & Gurbuz, 2014). Mastering conversation in the classroom leads to national and foreign career opportunities; otherwise, they will struggle (Hassania & Rajab, 2012). Language anxiety proves to effect students' achievement and success in various research. It has been seen in previous studies that anxiety affects students' performance in a variety of ways. According to Ewald (2007), those learners who face speaking anxiety have more chances of being afraid of failure. They are highly concerned about their mistakes that they might make while speaking. This overall accelerates their anxiety levels

Mobarak (2020) explored the reasons for the anxiety among students of Bangladesh. The findings of the study revealed that the leading causes of the students' speaking anxiety were communication uneasiness, fear of being judged by the fellows, and fear of taking the oral test.

Kalsoom et al. (2021) studied Anxiety provocation is common in foreign language learning conditions, and speaking is one of the most common abilities which aggravates. The researcher suggested that students should be made aware of the importance of speaking skills because this will create the need in them to practice their speaking skills. Once they are good at speaking, they can have improved learning outcomes and self-confidence as well.

Lack of trust and confidence in one's ability and apprehension to participate in contact or conversation, according to McCroskey (2015), are associated because of a fear of peer pressure. The role of shyness and insecurity in language speaking can be viewed in as many respects as possible.

According to Ellis (2015), a learner's anxiety level can rise up due to a lack of linguistic awareness. Moreover, students' anxiety levels rise for a variety of reasons,

including uninteresting tasks, a lack of teamwork, an ineffective instructional method, a highly demanding and structured classroom environment, time management issues, and teaching material that is meaningless. (Zia & Norrihan, 2015).

(K & Alamelu, 2020) studied the factors affecting and causing anxiety. The results revealed the external and internal factors causing anxiety. External factors included language, grammar, peer, and pronunciation while internal factors included stage fear, lack of confidence, and shyness factor

Abbasi et al. (2019) explored the factors affecting the speech of undergraduate students Sindh madressatul Islam University Karachi. The analysis showed two things: one was to figure out what the big challenges and roadblocks were, and the other was to figure out how to overcome them in order to improve the speaking skills of the students. It was found that students were having anxiety and they felt nervousness when they speak a second language. Additionally, it was suggested that students should develop the habit of speaking English in front of their peers. Teachers should provide an atmosphere where English is spoken every day. Moreover, students should spend some time watching English news channels with excessive reading and they should add new vocabulary items in their speech.

Sari (2017) studied the discomfort that many students face while communicating or trying to converse English in the lecture hall, which causes them to be unable to speak in front of others because of the anxiety they feel when doing so. Communication anticipation factor, facing anxiety before exams, fear of performing poor in assessments, and finally anxiety about English classes are four anxiety factors that lead students to be hesitant and nervous to speak English in the lecture hall.

Dundar (2013) suggested Mime, simulation, readers' theatre, frozen picture building, scriptwriting, and skits are all included in list of activities. All of these exercises have different focuses and goals for improving students' communicative skills, demonstrating the diverse variety of training options available by drama strategies.

Material and Methods

The mixed-method approach was used for the current study as it is the most appropriate approach for exploring the causes of English language speaking anxiety. Moreover, questionnaires were designed to discover students' perception and interviews were taken from teachers to observe their perceptions. The statistical data has been analyzed with the help of SPSS (version 21) and for representation of the gathered data, graphs have been used.

Data Collection Procedure

This research was conducted at Army Public School Mehfooz Shaheed Garrison in Lahore. The study's participants were students from grades 6 and 7. This paper enlists the participation of 100 students. There were four sections in total from which two sections were of grade 6 and the other two were of grade 7. For knowing teachers' perspective 25 teachers were selected from the English department. The interviews were recorded, and the teachers were also asked to fill the same questions in google forms so that the results remain accurate.

Results and Discussion

Students' Perceptions through Questionnaire

The questionnaire was adapted from Horwitz and Cope (1986) theory about foreign language speaking anxiety. The researcher developed the questionnaire after having the discussion with senior teaching staff at the workplace. The blend of Horwitz theory and the other added questions made the questionnaire more authentic. For analyzing the collected data through questionnaires, the researcher used SPSS for statistical analysis of the data.

Table 1
Response from the Students

Sr.	Questions	Strongly Disagree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	You get worried about committing mistakes in English language class.	16	53	14	15	2
2	You get nervous/afraid when you are unable to comprehend what the teacher is saying in the English language.	9	62	6	15	8
3	You get embarrassed when you volunteer answers in your language class.	8	44	11	25	12
4	You get worried when you have less time to think about what you have to speak.	16	47	17	16	4
5	Feeling of being judged makes you anxious	18	39	21	17	5
6	You feel anxious/tensed while waiting for your turn to speak English.	11	32	8	43	6
7	You feel a lot of pressure while speaking English for which you begin to speak fast.	6	40	23	25	6
8	In language class, you get so nervous that your mind becomes blank, and you forget things you know.	13	44	16	19	8
9	You feel shy when you speak in English.	16	52	6	21	5
10	You get anxious because you keep on thinking that other students are doing better than you in language class.	16	50	10	21	3
11	You feel self-conscious while speaking English in front of other students.	12	48	18	13	9
12	You are afraid that other students will laugh at you while you are speaking English.	11	55	10	15	9
13	Your mother tongue/national language is quite different from English language, so you get confused while shifting yourself from one language to another.	10	54	13	17	6
14	You think the syllabus for exams is lengthy and you are not given enough time to practice your speaking skills in the class.	8	35	17	29	11
15	You find it hard to look at the audience while speaking English.	13	39	9	28	11
16	The speaking tests in your language class make you more confused.	10	31	14	28	16
17	I worry that my English listening ability is not good when it comes to English Language.	14	46	17	16	7
18	You feel that not knowing enough vocabulary is the biggest problem preventing you from speaking in English language easily.	16	42	19	16	7
19	You are unable to comprehend what someone is saying in English language.	6	31	20	29	14
20	You feel the grammar of English language is difficult to grasp.	8	41	20	23	8
21	The gap between you and your language teacher makes you feel not to speak confidently.	9	35	14	27	15
22	Failures in the past make you dissatisfied with your own ability.	10	40	17	21	12
23	Your teachers and parents do not speak English frequently for which your exposure is less. This thing is the cause for not speaking confidently.	11	37	10	23	19

24	You feel worried because you cannot speak well in English so you would not be getting a decent job in future.	16	48	6	24	6
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25. In your opinion what should be done to overcome your speaking anxiety.

Majority of the students suggested that their exposure to English should be increased. They will become more proficient the more they communicate with their families, peers, and teachers. Some suggested that the school should arrange a special English-speaking class where they could participate in a variety of speaking exercises to develop their speaking and communication skills. Moreover, some students believed that watching English movies and reading books will help them develop their speaking abilities. A few of them were of the opinion that the classroom atmosphere should be made more welcoming so that everyone is comfortable speaking up. Some people also believe that mastering grammar and expanding one's vocabulary will assist a learner in communicating properly.

Teachers' Perceptions through Interviews

For taking Interviews, 25 teachers were selected from Army Public Mehfooz Shaheed Garrison, Lahore. The teachers were having more than five years of experience in the field of Education. The interviews were taken in the free slots when the teachers were available.

1. In your opinion, what are the causes of English language speaking anxiety among your students?

Some of the teachers believed that lack of confidence is the cause of English language speaking anxiety among their students. While some said that parents are not highly educated and lack of exposure to target language is the reason for which students are not able to speak properly. Lack of reading is another reason which some of the teachers believed as reading improves language skills of the learners. Few of them said that the students do not know the tenses properly which often puzzles and confuses them when they speak English. The target language is totally different from their mother tongue and hence we see many people who suffer from this inability. Moreover, some replied that peer pressure causes the students to lose their confidence. They feel as if other students will make fun of them and they feel others are better at speaking English.

2. How do you get to know that your student is anxious while speaking English?

Some teachers believed that when their students are anxious, they take long pauses and prefer to remain silent. when asked to volunteer something in class. Some teachers claimed that their expressions, body language, and gestures indicate that they are insecure and perplexed.

Some claimed that their students began to speak faster because of an increased level of pressure they face while speaking English.

3. What sort of role is played by you to make your student confident while speaking English?

Majority of the teachers believed „practice makes the man perfect“. They were of the view that speaking in English frequently will make the students confident. They said positive reinforcement and encouragement make them do better.

4. Do you think that parents also play a role in building confidence of speaking English among their children?

Majority of the teachers considered that parents play a vital role in building the confidence of speaking English among their children. They believed that parents can do so by encouraging them to speak in English, to make them watch English movies and news channels. Parents can increase their exposure by frequently speaking in English to that they get used to it.

Discussion

Causes of English Language Speaking Anxiety

Following are the causes which hinder the students' ability to speak confidently.

Lack of Exposure

From the results of the present study, it has been shown that both teachers and students believed that lack of exposure is the reason for causing anxiety. The students do not speak English at their homes since certain parents are not highly educated and they are unable to communicate efficiently with their children in English. The other reason for not speaking frequently outside the classroom is their lack of interest in a second language. Students just speak English when they are asked to speak in class for which their exposure to English is quite less outside the classroom. Also, they do not profusely watch English movies and read books which limits their exposure to the English language. Exposure makes the students confident enough to communicate fluently in the English language.

Social Pressure

According to the English Journal, Social pressure is "the force of public opinion and the effect upon us of what others think." The present study shows that students and teachers both believed that social pressure is one of the main reasons to build up to speaking anxiety. Similarly, McCroskey (2015) believed that lack of trust and confidence in one's ability and apprehension to participate in conversation is associated with peer pressure and their negative judgment. Students struggled to speak fluently and accurately due to their fear of communication. Disturbances such as panicking when asked to speak English without any planning, being nervous in front of students, and feeling anxious when asked to share thoughts in English.

Strict Classroom Environment and De-Motivation

The strict classroom environment makes it difficult for the learners to speak confidently. From the results of the present study, it has been shown that students learn better in a friendly environment where the gap between the teacher and the learner is less. The teacher-centered class, where the teacher is dominant makes the learner habitual of keeping quiet. This thing eventually reduces their exposure.

Asadi, (2020) has recommended some strategies to motivate the learners for speaking effectively and the strategies included in his study were to boost the confidence of the students so that they can participate easily in the class. With regard to reducing learners' anxiety, considering mistakes as a natural part of learning, creating a non-threatening atmosphere, and having a friendly relationship with students.

The research proved similar pedagogical implications as Mak (2011) according to which teachers should reassure students that their errors will not be penalized. It was observed when students' errors are corrected by teachers, it makes them anxious. He proposed that by building relationships with their students, teachers might help them overcome their fear of learning a second language. Teachers should offer students equal

chances and pay more attention to them. However, the teaching situation and procedures in the second language classroom vary.

Speaking Tests

The present study reveals that speaking tests cause anxiety as the students find it hard to speak in front of the whole class. The students memorize what they have to say, and this thing creates pressure on them to speak perfectly in front of others. (Salehi & Marefat (2014) has recommended in their research that teachers should overcome classroom anxiety since both language and test anxiety have a negative correlation with the performance of the students.

Difference in the Language System

The difference between the language system of students' mother tongue and second language makes it difficult for them to shift from one language to another. The students think that grammar and vocabulary of English language are difficult for them to learn.

Twin Parker (2001) was of the view that there is a difference in the language system especially tenses of both languages are different, and it is commonly observed when the students learn or speak English as a second or foreign language, they commit errors because of the fact that English tenses are unique, and it is difficult to grasp them easily. According to Awan et al (2010), anxiety can cause a heap of issues for students in terms of language learning, retention, and development. The problem further exacerbates when the learners need to make the transition from Urdu to English instructions in the class as the language system for both of the language is completely different.

Lack of Confidence

To talk a language without discomfort or apprehension, the language user must have a high level of confidence. When a student feels compelled or obligated to make an impression on the public but lacks faith in his or her own abilities, anxiety develops. Typically, the students' L2 lexicon, vocabulary, or grammar was incomplete. It is thought to be one of the most valuable variables ever discovered. Researchers have found that a lack of faith is an effective factor that negatively affects outcomes.

Comprehension Issues

The students are unable to comprehend what somebody is saying in English. This mostly happens because of the reason that their exposure is less, and they are not used to of understanding and comprehending. Furthermore, they follow the application of memorization and rote learning as a primary method of acquiring and learning the language. They put a heavy focus on catching and correcting errors, both inscribed and verbal, and the application of translation as a method of learning (Dong, 2007).

The results from the present research show that failures in the past make the students disbelieve their ability to do better. They have lack motivation as they do not have confidence on themselves. They feel as if others are doing better than them, and they do not have confidence to speak. From the current study it has shown that 40% students do not trust their ability due to the failure in the past. They lose their confidence in themselves.

Unsuitable Teaching Techniques and Lengthy Syllabus

According to (Awan et al., 2010), it has been challenging for the students in Pakistan to learn in a class which is teacher centered. Because the teachers have a complete control over the class and the students' views are not considered frequently. This gives little chance to the learners to practice speaking. Many students were asked to speak English and they face difficulty in speaking and were anxious.

It has also been observed in the present study that the pressure of covering the syllabus puts the teacher under pressure. The teachers are focused on the preparation of exams. Some of the times teachers even dictate the answers and ask the students to rote learn them. This thing overall makes the class as teacher-centered and they are unable to develop their comprehension and creativity skills. This pressure does not even allow us to have any extra time for discussions in the class.

Analysis of students' Questionnaires and teachers' interviews depicts that they have similarities in their perspectives regarding the causes of English Language speaking anxiety. The causes are quite clear since the majority considers those things as the cause of not speaking confidently. Both students and teachers think the main reason for the anxiety in speaking English is that the exposure of the students is less in speaking English. Due to the structural and grammatical differences between their mother tongue and English language, they find it challenging to shift from one language to the other. Students and teachers agree that students' anxiety stems from a sense of uneasiness and fear of committing mistakes. They are mostly afraid of being judged by their peers especially when they have to give the speaking test in front of their peers. Furthermore, they believe that not understanding the grammar and using a limited vocabulary are two of the most significant factors. Students feel that they are unable to comprehend when someone says something in the English language and also, their listening ability for English is less as compared to their mother tongue. Then, they think that the pressure of doing well in written exams and to cover the lengthy syllabus hinders the speaking activities or classroom discussions to take place. Additionally, they lack the confidence to face the audience is one of the common reasons for the students to get confused while speaking English. These things as a whole make a learner an anxious person and then it becomes difficult for him to speak English confidently. They consider that gap between the teacher and the students causes them to be perplexed and fearful of communicating in front of the teacher. Also, Failures in the past have made them doubt their abilities, and they believe they will never be able to find a decent career in their lives.

The recommendations and solutions given by students and teachers were almost identical. They both consider that the exposure of speaking the English language should be increased at homes and schools as well. In this way, students get to practice more, and they get fluent in speaking. This thing increases their confidence in themselves. Furthermore, they suggested that watching English movies and news improves their vocabulary along with their language skills as a whole. Reading strategies can also help students to develop their speaking skills. They also considered learning atmosphere should be friendlier, and teachers should encourage the students by positive reinforcement to improve their shortcomings. Also, there should be separate speaking classes arranged for the students at school.

Conclusion

The present study explored the perception about the origins of English language speaking anxiety. Hundred students and 25 teachers were selected from a well-reputed school. To fill the gap between the literatures, a mixed-method approach has been used

where the data is analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The study is specifically done on secondary school students. Before that most of the research was conducted on university students. As language learning procedures start from a very young age so it is necessary to explore the anxiety-causing elements from a young age. Secondary students are at a stage of developing their skills to learn the language efficiently, so it is the best time to capture the root cause of the problems hindering them from speaking confidently. The major causes are lack of exposure, peer or social pressure, different language systems, difficult grammar, and vocabulary, speaking tests, unsuitable teaching techniques, difficulty in comprehension, and lack of confidence. In terms of effective facets of learning, the results have pedagogical consequences for which students can overcome their speaking anxiety and for teachers for creating an anxiety-free classroom. The language-speaking activities should be interesting so that the learners remain active in the class.

The findings of this study can also aid teachers and students in changing their approaches towards language teaching and learning, respectively. This could encourage secondary students to pay more consideration to communicative practices and develop their communication skills. Lastly, it might assist secondary school policymakers and operators to recognize the convolution of instituting those teaching methods into the syllabus which would be the reason for reducing speaking anxiety among learners. Finally, it may help secondary school policymakers and administration grasp the complexities of incorporating such teaching approaches into the curriculum, which will reduce learners' speech anxiety.

Recommendations

After ascertaining the sources of English language speaking anxiety and by viewing the recommendations and opinions by teachers and students respectively, the following measures can be taken to overcome speaking anxiety. The first thing to overcome speaking anxiety is practice. As practice makes the man perfect same holds true for gaining the confidence of speaking English fluently. For this purpose, the students should be given exposure to improve their language skills. Students should encourage each other positively to speak English and they should avoid using sarcasm especially when the other person is trying to speak English. The school should arrange extra classes for the learners to practice their speaking skills. The students having anxiety will feel comfortable and can communicate easily. Parents should encourage them to read novels, magazines, and newspapers at home. Students should also be reassured to speak English beside the classroom as well. The class should be students centered where students will be given more time to speak. It is suggested for the teachers to make the classroom environment friendly, and they should avoid directly pointing out the mistakes rather positively correct them. English teachers must be able to recognize each of their students' personalities in the classroom specifically, as each student's anxiety level varies. English teachers should be able to place themselves as saviors in the classroom. They should be able to provide a secure teaching-learning procedure for their students instead of finding the teaching-learning process terrifying and daunting to their students' self-confidence and assurance. The material in classroom can be used in cultural context to motivate the students in speaking second language. Moreover, they can be given pair works and group works, once they are confident enough to speak publicly then they should be given individual presentations in the class so that they can present confidently on their own. Grading system should be used instead of numerals to show their scores. The teachers can take practice tests to make them comfortable with speaking tests in class. Teachers should tell the students that being stressful and committing mistakes is all natural and is part of learning.

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