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English Language learning Anxiety Among Pakistani University Students

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ABSTRACT

English language learning anxiety is a significant affective factor influencing students' academic participation and performance in second language classrooms. This study explores English Language Learning Anxiety (ELLA) among Pakistani university students through the lens of Horwitz, (Yu Cui, 2025), and Cope's (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) Model, which conceptualizes anxiety as comprising communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. The study adopted a qualitative exploratory research design to gain an in-depth understanding of learners' emotional experiences in English language classrooms. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with ten (10) undergraduate students enrolled in the 7th semester of the Education Department at the University of Gujrat, Pakistan. The participants had extensive experience with English-medium instruction and classroom-based oral activities. The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis, guided by the three core components of the FLCA model. The findings revealed that communication apprehension was the most prominent source of anxiety, particularly during oral presentations and classroom discussions. Fear of negative evaluation from teachers and peers significantly reduced students' confidence and willingness to participate. At the same time, test anxiety emerged during assessments, presentations, and examinations, leading to stress and performance difficulties. The results indicate that English language anxiety is largely classroom-specific and shaped by instructional practices, peer interaction, and evaluation methods. The study concludes that reducing English language anxiety requires supportive classroom environments, constructive feedback, and anxiety-sensitive assessment practices. The findings offer practical implications for English language teachers and curriculum designers in Pakistani universities to foster confidence and active participation among learners.

1. Introduction

ELLA is a big issue to the Pakistani university students because of high stakes (jobs, status), negative appraisal, lack of confidence, poor practice and teacher-centered, grammar-based methods, which leads to poor participation, avoidance and low performance, but the coping strategies, such as peer support and exposure to the media, may help (Ahmad et al., 2023). The primary causes are the societal appreciation of the English language, the replacement of the Urdu language by the English language in education, and the fear of grammatical mistakes.

The English language is essential in academic achievement, employment abilities, and worldwide communication, particularly in underdeveloped nations like Pakistan, where English is an official language and a significant language of education in educational institutions (Imran et al., 2024). At the higher-education level, the students are supposed to read academic texts, engage in oral presentations, make presentations, and write research reports using English. Although this is the key role of the English language, most Pakistani university students are found to lack confidence, communication, and emotional comfort in using the language. Among other affective barriers, English language learning anxiety has been identified as one of the most common and impactful obstacles that have a profound impact on the performance and engagement of the students (Samad et al., 2023). Learners tend to be afraid of mistakes, being evaluated by their fellow learners, and being evaluated based on their academic performance, and this will bring about a cycle of avoidance, silence, and low performance in terms of learning.

Conventionally, the understanding of language anxiety was a constant psychological characteristic. Nevertheless, recent works in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) argue with this perspective and suggest that the role of anxiety is related to context and is dynamic. The FLCA model, put forward in the field of SLA by Larsen-Freeman (1997, 2006), holds that language learning is not a predictable and linear process, but that it is a developing system that is affected by many interacting variables in the form of classroom climate, peer behavior, teacher feedback, task difficulty, and learner identity. In this view, anxiety does not have a fixed state; it instead varies with each moment depending on social and academic interactions (Hashimi et al., 2025). This can be shown by even minor classroom situations, like the tone of a teacher or a response of a peer, which can cause a person to feel anxiety. FLCA is thus very useful in explaining how the emotional experiences of Pakistani students change during classroom activities.

In line with this dynamic view, FLCA in SLA proposes an approach to language learning based on strengths and well-being orientation. According to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, researchers, including Dewaele, MacIntyre, and Mercer, also emphasize the value of positive feelings, including Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE), confidence, resilience, and positive relationships (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi et al., 2023). According to FLCA, positive emotions expand the cognitive resources, engage more, and compensate for the negative consequences of anxiety. This is more applicable in English classrooms where fun, motivation, and positive teacher-student communication can help to minimize the fear of being judged negatively. Although FLCA describes the way that anxiety varies, FLCA in SLA describes why positive emotions can change the attitudes, motivation, and confidence of learners (Malik & Pervaiz, 2023).

Although the English language plays a crucial role in Pakistani universities, most of the students continue to experience the dominating tension in English language classrooms. Such nervousness is especially evident in terms of the activities of oral communication, where the students are scared because they can be judged due to the incorrect accent they use, they make some grammatical mistakes, or they feel inhibited (Liu & Wang, 2023). This is augmented by conventional teacher-centered classroom practices, a little exposure to the English language outside the school, as well as high levels of social comparison with more competent children (Rasool et al., 2023). Despite the significance of emotional well-being in learning a language, the literature indicates that very limited studies have been conducted in Pakistan to test the English language anxiety based on contemporary models like the FLCA in SLA. Thus, one needs to investigate how Pakistani students develop anxiety in the English language when they are placed in the dynamic classroom setting and how positive emotionality can be used to mitigate the effect.

1.1. Research Gap

Past research on Pakistani studies has concentrated predominantly on determining the sources of anxiety (e.g., fear of evaluation or lack of language proficiency, etc.), but not on the cause of anxiety itself, like:

- how anxiety fluctuates in real-time classroom situations (FLCA perspective), or
- how positive emotions, enjoyment, and resilience can reduce anxiety (PP in SLA perspective).

There is therefore a lack of integrated studies using both modern theoretical frameworks to understand language anxiety among Pakistani university students (Samad et al., 2021). This study aims to explore English Language Learning Anxiety among 7th-semester Education students at the University of Gujrat using Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) model. Specifically, it seeks to examine students' experiences of communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety in English language classrooms (Arshad et al., 2024). The study also aims to understand how classroom practices and evaluation methods contribute to anxiety. Ultimately, the research intends to offer pedagogical insights for reducing anxiety and enhancing student participation.

1.2. Research Questions

- What forms of English Language Learning Anxiety do 7th-semester Education students at the University of Gujrat experience in English language classrooms?
- How do communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety affect students' participation and confidence in using English?
- What classroom practices and assessment-related factors contribute to English language anxiety among these students?

Combined, the background, theoretical framing, and increasing necessity of emotionally grounded approaches render the study of language anxiety an urgent and crucial one. The application of the FLCA to learn how anxiety changes and how positive emotions promote learning, respectively, makes this study a complete insight into the English language anxiety of Pakistani students in the university (Pathan et al., 2021). The interviews of the ten respondents provide helpful ideas about the emotional truths of English education, which can be applied to a more informed teaching practice and a more helpful academic atmosphere.

2. Literature review

As a result of globalization, English has become an important aspect of communication, education, and career. Khan and Mohammed (2024) insist that it has an unquestionable contribution to global communication. However, more significantly, it has been a gateway to higher education, career opportunities, and involvement in international affairs. Bibi, Irshad, and Begum (2024) also indicated that English in Pakistan is not only a foreign language, but it has also become part of the education and professional system in Pakistan (Sabir et al., 2022). Schools teach it, and it is used as the language of instruction in most universities at the graduate and professional levels. The reality, though, is that a wide percentage of students in Pakistan are afraid of communicating in English, particularly in a school setting. This has been referred to as English Language Anxiety (ELA), and it has harmful consequences for academic involvement, productivity, and language learning experiences of the students.

The problem of language anxiety has been broadly recognized to be one of the most significant affective factors that influence the academic performance of language learners, their participation in classrooms, as well as their confidence in their communicative skills. Lange Anxiety Starting with the seminal study of Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), linguistic anxiety was conceived as a context-dependent type of anxiety that occurred specifically due to language-learning situations. Their model had three key elements: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety that collectively form emotional barriers that inhibit the performance of learners to their optimum capabilities (Sabir et al., 2022). Other studies that followed would affirm that anxious learners tend to have cognitive interference, shorter attention span, and avoidance behaviours that have a direct influence on their speaking, understanding, and

retaining language forms. These initial works played a critical role in the awareness of anxiety as a significant variable in SLA. However, they were more likely to regard it as comparatively constant, measurable, and uninterrupted in different environments. This fixed perception was later called into question because the scholars observed that there are vast differences in the emotional reactions of learners despite learning within the same classroom.

Arguably, Akhtar and Khan (2021) English Language Anxiety (ELA) is a form of anxiety that is generated in circumstances where the person involved is supposed to express himself or herself in English, particularly in educational, professional, or social situations. It is rather complicated because it encompasses a broad range of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reactions that could include fear, self-doubt, and avoidance (Nawaz et al., 2024; Azhar, 2024; Akhtar & Khan, 2021). A more fundamental underpinning of the ELA lies in the fact that the phenomenon of foreign language anxiety (FLA) was first systematically discovered by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986). They defined FLA as a cluster of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors, which are involved in learning a new language in an academic environment (Ali et al., 2021). Such a definition characterizes the strangest fears and worries associated with the struggle to speak a second or third language, the shyness to make any kind of speech out of embarrassment, their overestimation, and even the psychological pressure of familiarization with the new language system (Azhar, 2024; Akhtar & Khan, 2021). ELA, as a product of FLA, may be linked to the fear of non-native speakers of English to speak English, which is a high-level language in the international world and which is connected to education and employment opportunities.

According to the author of the above-mentioned studies, Khan, Ann, and Khatoon (2022), the origin of English language anxiety (ELA) is quite broad and diverse, encompassing both psychological, social, and even educational aspects. The most widespread of them is the fear of negative evaluation. This is because of the language gaps that they feel they have as compared to other students, their teachers, or even themselves (Nawaz et al., 2024; Azhar, 2024; Khan, Ann, and Khatoon, 2022). This is most catastrophic to students whose studies are being taught in English, as everyone is too aware of their perceived deficiencies. This fear may occur in several ways, such as the inability to take an active part in classroom discussions, stand up in front of the classroom, or talk, criticizing themselves and their English proficiency all the time. Another common cause of ELA, low self-esteem and confidence, can be attributed to this fear of negative assessment (An et al., 2022). Lack of confidence and self-esteem of students about their abilities in English will probably lead to anxiety as they lack the motivation to participate in any activity related to language (Nawaz et al., 2024; Azhar, 2024; Khan, Ann, and Khatoon, 2022). They lack confidence since this is what reminds them of past experiences, such as mean feedback or failed expectations in learning the language.

2.1. Anxiety, Speaking Performance, and Classroom Interaction

Speaking panic has become the most popular aspect of language anxiety since oral communication also presupposes urgent processing, performance in front of an audience, and exposure to judgment. A study by Woodrow (2006) has shown that speaking tasks cause the most anxiety among university students, especially those that are assessment-based or public presentations. The same results are presented by Liu and Jackson (2008), who state that even students who are good at grammar and reading tend to avoid speaking because they are afraid of making an error or receiving negative feedback. Interaction in the classroom is also largely critical in determining these emotional experiences. The research of Young (1991) and others indicates that the behavior of teachers, their feedback style, peer reaction, and classroom climate have a substantial impact on whether the learners are supported or threatened (Malik, Qin, Oteir, et al., 2021). To illustrate, anxiety may be triggered by strict correction, too much teacher control, or competitive classroom organization. In contrast, supportive feedback, patience, and the ability to work in groups help the learner feel safer. In the Asian and South Asian setting, such as in the case of Pakistan, students will not interact with one another because of the fear of embarrassment, which shows how cultural norms concerning respect, authority, and saving face contribute to language-related anxiety.

2.2. Language Anxiety in the Pakistani Context

English plays a special sociolinguistic role in Pakistan. It is used as the language of power, mobility, and academic success. Even though students learn English starting in primary school and further, the early

learning level is usually grammar-focused and exam-driven, and students have few chances to engage in communicative activities. This means that students report to universities with decent reading and grammar standards, but low speaking confidence. According to local studies, there are always high scores in the speaking anxiety of Pakistani students because of fear of being negatively assessed, insecurity in pronunciation, and lack of real-life experiences with English. A lot of students are also under pressure to speak in the standard English accents, which further make them less confident. Besides, Pakistani classrooms are often teacher-centered, and there is a limited number of interactive activities, which leads to the situation where learners do not practice spontaneous communication (AL-Qadri et al., 2023). These social, cultural, and pedagogical facts lead to significant variations in the level of anxiety, whereby students might feel comfortable when talking with peers in an informal setting yet become very nervous when making a presentation or being interrogated by a teacher. This does not imply that all the studies regarding this field have been restored to enhance the level of research in this area. However, most studies done in Pakistan continue to assume that anxiety is a fixed construct, and that the emotional experiences of learners are dynamic and context-bound (Amur et al., 2023).

2.3. FLCA and Its Relevance to Anxiety

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA), introduced by Horwitz and Cope (1986), refers to a situation-specific form of anxiety that occurs in second or foreign language learning contexts. Unlike general anxiety, FLCA is directly linked to classroom activities and learning environments. The model identifies three core components of language anxiety: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety (Bukhari et al., 2023). Communication apprehension arises when learners feel nervous about speaking or listening in the target language, particularly during oral activities (Ayub & Khaleel, 2024). Fear of negative evaluation means fear of being evaluated negatively by the teacher or peers, and test anxiety means the fear of being stressed during the assessment and performance-based activities. The FLCA model can be very applicable in learning about anxiety in English language classrooms as it elaborates on the role that instructional activities, teacher feedback, peer interaction, and assessment strategies play in determining the emotions of the learners. When used in a university, where oral presentations and assessments are common, FLCA can be used to determine the exact situations in the classroom that cause anxiety. Using this model, teachers can create favorable learning conditions where anxiety is minimized, and students are motivated to participate actively in the process of learning a language.

2.4. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety in Second Language Acquisition

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA), introduced by Horwitz and Cope (1986), refers to a situation-specific form of anxiety that occurs in second or foreign language learning contexts. Unlike general anxiety, FLCA is directly linked to classroom activities and learning environments. The model identifies three core components of language anxiety: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety (Bukhari et al., 2023). Communication apprehension arises when learners feel nervous about speaking or listening in the target language, particularly during oral activities (Ayub & Khaleel, 2024). Fear of negative evaluation means fear of being evaluated negatively by the teacher or peers, and test anxiety means the fear of being stressed during the assessment and performance-based activities. The FLCA model can be very applicable in learning about anxiety in English language classrooms as it elaborates on the role that instructional activities, teacher feedback, peer interaction, and assessment strategies play in determining the emotions of the learners. When used in a university, where oral presentations and assessments are common, FLCA can be used to determine the exact situations in the classroom that cause anxiety. Using this model, teachers can create favorable learning conditions where anxiety is minimized, and students are motivated to participate actively in the process of learning a language.

Studies in SLA have indicated that excessive amounts of FLCA may have a negative impact on the willingness to communicate, self-confidence, and academic performance of learners. Thus, the knowledge of FLCA can help researchers and educators recognize the classroom practices that generate anxiety, as well as implement teaching strategies that reduce the evaluative activity and facilitate learner involvement.

2.5. FLCA in Second Language Acquisition

In Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) has been recognized as a key affective factor influencing learners' performance and participation. According to Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), FLCA provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how anxiety emerges from specific classroom situations rather than from general personality traits (Liu & Wang, 2023). According to Ramzan, the model explains that learners' emotional responses are shaped by classroom interaction, evaluation practices, and instructional methods through the interrelated components of communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety (Ramzan et al., 2025). The relevance of FLCA is particularly significant in contexts such as Pakistan, where English is taught as a foreign language and classroom-based speaking and assessment activities often provoke anxiety (Apridayani et al., 2023). The model allows teachers and researchers to identify anxiety-inducing practices, such as excessive correction, public error exposure, or high-stakes assessments. By understanding these sources of anxiety, educators can design more supportive and less threatening classroom environments. Overall, the FLCA framework offers a focused and practical approach for analyzing language anxiety and improving English language teaching and learning outcomes.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

In the study, the qualitative exploratory research design was used to explore English Language Learning Anxiety (ELLA) among 7th-semester Education students at the University of Gujrat, Pakistan. The model of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) was used to guide the study because language anxiety is the classroom-specific construct that involves communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety.

A qualitative design was deemed to be a proper choice since language anxiety is an emotional and subjective experience that can only be explained by personal experiences of the students and their thoughts. This design enabled the exploration of feelings, perceptions, and experiences of learners related to the use of the English language in the classroom in-depth. The study also sought to describe the nature and sources of anxiety in actual academic situations instead of quantifying the anxiety, as the study relied on the narratives of the participants.

3.2. Participants

The sample members in this research were ten (10) undergraduate students of the University of Gujrat, Department of Education, 7th semester, Pakistan. Students were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that they had ample experience in using English-based instruction and oral activities that were conducted in a classroom setting, such as presentations and discussions. Both male and female students participated in the study, which had an age range of 21 to 24 years. It was believed that the sample size was adequate in a qualitative study since the aim of the study was to seek in-depth information on the experiences students had under English language learning anxiety and not to generalize the results statistically. Informed consent was given by all the participants beforehand.

3.3. Data Collection Method

The information needed to conduct this research was gathered by semi-structured interviews, which is one of the most popular approaches in qualitative research that is used to investigate the emotions, perception, and experience of learners in the classroom. According to Kurakan, this approach was chosen since it gives the participants a chance to tell their feelings and thoughts without restrictions, and the researcher can concentrate on specific issues surrounding English language learning anxiety (Kurakan, 2021). The questions put in the interview were based on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) model of Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) and especially on communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Semi-structured interviews led to rich and detailed information and helped to gain in-depth concepts of the experience of anxiety in English language classes among students.

3.3.1 Interview Procedure

All the interviews took about 10 to 15 minutes and were either in person or based on the availability of the participants. All interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees to be

transcribed accurately (Creswell, 2018). The interview guide was built on the primary constructs in the literature, which were anxiety triggers, situational variability, classroom climate, teacher-student interaction, peer influence, enjoyment, and emotional support. The open-ended format gave the participants the chance to narrate their experiences in detail, and the follow-up questions were used to investigate the changes in emotions and factors in the context that provoked them.

3.4. Data Collection Process

The thematic analysis was used to analyse the collected data based on the structure suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis was chosen due to its capacity to make a systematic identification of patterns, organization and interpretation of the patterns in qualitative data. It was initiated by repeated reading of the transcripts so that one becomes conversant with contents. This step enabled the researcher to get submerged in the data and identify preliminary impressions regarding anxiety-inducing factors, emotional swings, and positive experiences of learning (Pervaiz et al., 2022). Following familiarization, the first round of coding was done manually. Coding was done by marking important statements or pieces of text that were relevant to the research questions. Some of the earliest codes were fear of making mistakes, judgment of peers, encouragement by teachers and temporary confidence (Braun, 2006). After coding all the important excerpts, the researcher combined similar codes and further divided them into larger themes. These topics were the trends that were repeated among participants and gave an understanding of the emotional nature underlying the English language learning.

3.5. Data Analysis

The thematic analysis was applied to analyze data based on the six-step approach of Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis was selected because it is flexible and applicable in determining patterns of qualitative emotional data.

Step 1: Familiarization

The interview transcripts were read several times by the researcher to comprehend the emotional stories of participants in their entirety.

Step 2: Generating Initial Codes

Meaningful portions of text were given codes that were associated with anxiety, emotional swings, interactions in the classroom, support by teachers, influence by peers, enjoyment, or coping strategies.

Step 3: Searching for Themes.

Codes were clustered into broader themes such as “fear of negative evaluation,” “situational anxiety during speaking,” “teacher behavior as a trigger or reducer,” “peer comparison,” “emergent moments of confidence,” and “enjoyment as a protective factor.”

Step 4: Reviewing Themes

Themes were refined to ensure they accurately reflected the data. Overlapping themes were combined, and irrelevant codes were removed.

Step 5: Defining and Naming Themes

Each theme was clearly defined, showing how it aligns with FLCA in SLA (positive emotions supporting learning).

Step 6: Producing the Report

Themes were synthesized into coherent findings supported by direct quotations from participants. Thematic analysis allowed the researcher to interpret both negative and positive emotional dimensions of the learners' experiences.

3.6. Trustworthiness

To guarantee the reliability of the research, several standard methods of conducting qualitative studies were used. Member checking was employed to increase the credibility in that the participants would make sure the accuracy of their responses was correct during and after the interview (Lincoln, 1985). Reliability was provided through a concise and steady research process and recording of every phase of data collection/analysis. The issue of confirmability was resolved by means of reflexive practices in the sense that the researcher recognized his/her personal assumptions and reduced the chances of bias during interpretation (Birt, 2016). The transferability was strengthened through the description of the research setting and the participants in detail so that the reader can evaluate how the findings can be applicable to other educational institutions.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

The ethical principles were adhered to during the research. The participants were notified of the objective of the research and their rights prior to participation. Each of the participants was informed and guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity (Cohen, 2018). The identity of the participants was safeguarded by the pseudonym and, all data were securely stored and were utilized in accordance with academic research purposes (Orb, 2001). The participants were told about their right to drop the study at any point, without any penalty. The sensitivity of the issue surrounding the discussion of anxiety also meant that the participants were allowed to omit any question that they felt uncomfortable about.

4. Results and Findings of The Study

This section reports the central results of the semi-structured interview with ten 7th-semester Education students at the University of Gujrat in Pakistan. The evaluation showed that there were several intersecting themes that describe the nature and sources of English Language Learning Anxiety (ELLA) in classrooms. Based on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) model proposed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), the results reveal that anxiety in students is primarily due to anxiety over communicating negatively, negative evaluation anxiety, and anxiety over failures in tests. The findings show that the anxiety about the English language is a classroom-related phenomenon that has a strong association with speaking tasks, peer and teacher assessment, and scoring. Such results point to the ability of instructional practice and assessment settings to define the emotional experiences of learners during English language classes.

4.1. Overview of Emerging Themes

The thematic analysis produced five major themes:

1. Fear of making mistakes and negative peer judgment
2. Dynamic fluctuations of anxiety across classroom situations
3. Influence of past negative experiences
4. Role of teachers and peers in shaping emotional states
5. Positive emotions as regulators of anxiety

A frequency summary of how many participants mentioned each theme is shown below.

Table 1. Frequency of Themes Identified in Interviews

Theme	Participants Mentioning Theme (n=10)	Interpretation
Fear of making mistakes & peer judgment	9	Most dominant anxiety trigger
Fluctuating/context-dependent anxiety	8	Anxiety changes by task & setting

Past negative learning experiences	7	Emotional history shapes current anxiety
Influence of teacher & peer relationships	10	Most universal emotional factor
Positive emotions enhance confidence	8	Key moderating emotional force

These frequencies do not represent statistical measurements but serve as a descriptive summary of thematic prominence across interviews.

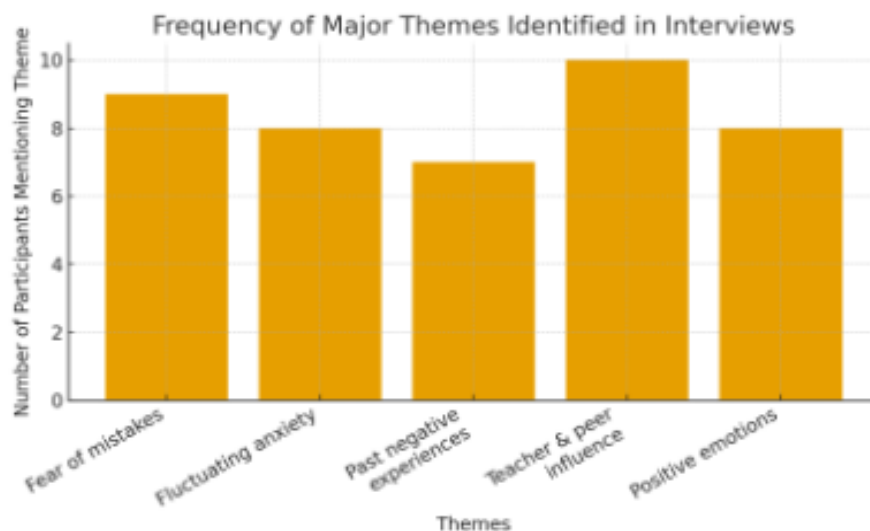


Figure 1: Frequency of Major Themes Emerging from Interview Data.

This figure summarizes the distribution of recurring themes identified across all interview transcripts. Operational challenges emerged as the most frequently reported theme, followed by customer satisfaction factors and logistic workflow concerns.

4.2. Fear of Making Mistakes and Peer Judgment

The significant finding of the research was that most of the respondents felt really anxious when addressing the classroom using English. Nine students out of ten gave fear as a reason for having wrong pronunciation, grammatical errors and fluency deficiency. This anxiety was mainly based on fear of negative assessment, especially the fear of being judged, mocked or being looked at as a weak person by others. Even some easy tasks, such as speaking in front of classmates, brought stress. According to Horwitz and Cope's (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) model, such fear of negative evaluation is a core component of classroom language anxiety. Participants further reported that heightened anxiety disrupted their cognitive processing, making it challenging to recall vocabulary or construct coherent sentences during speaking activities.

4.3. Dynamic, Fluctuating Nature of Anxiety

The emotional state of students was very dynamic as it was modified with each moment based on the activity, the classroom setting, and how prepared students felt. Anxiety levels were likely to be at their highest point when speaking in front of the audience, when answering, and when teachers unexpectedly called them. On the contrary, pair work and small group discussions were found to be less threatening and more comfortable.

The respondents did not report their anxiety as always present, but rather it altered in response to situational indicators. This result justifies the focus of the FLCA model on non-linearity, in which

emotions change depending on interactions between internal states and external conditions. Even students who had affirmed that they felt confident were able to admit that their anxiety levels would suddenly increase in new or highly critical circumstances.

4.4. Lasting Impact of Past Negative Learning Experiences

One more theme, which had a considerable impact on emotional reaction, was the impact of negative experiences of the past. A lot of participants had emotional recollections at school where they were judged by teachers when they made mistakes, their classmates mocked them due to their pronunciation, or they were instructed on their errors in such a row. These childhood experiences entrenched fear within them that lasted a long time into their college life.

These past experiences were the emotional baggage or emotional attractors, and this meant that the students were more susceptible to such experiences in present-day classrooms. Those who participated indicated that although the environment was conducive, memories of previous humiliations would be activated, thus causing anxiety even without expecting it.

4.5. Influence of Teacher and Peer Relationships

The respondents were unanimous that the behaviour of teachers was a huge determinant of their level of comfort in English classes. Teachers who were strict, impatient or very formal were more likely to bring about anxiety, and thus the students will not want to participate. On the other hand, smiling, comforting students, encouraging, and flexible expression of teachers had a positive effect on confidence.

There was also a role of peers. Positive peers eased the pressure and provided a feeling of protection, whereas the judgmental or fluent peers heightened inferiority. The learners were specifically afraid whenever they were among competitive classmates or whenever they addressed strangers.

The results make it clear that anxiety does not exist as a purely inward psychological process; instead, it becomes manifested in the process of social interaction, which can confirm the vision of the FLCA model, according to which emotions are relational and situation-specific.

Table 2. Emotional Triggers Identified by Participants

Category	Examples Reported by Students
Teacher-Related Triggers	Strict tone, rapid correction, public criticism
Peer-Related Triggers	Laughter, mockery, and comparison with fluent peers
Task-Related Triggers	Presentations, sudden questioning, grammar accuracy
Environmental Triggers	Large class size, competitive atmosphere

4.6. Role of Positive Emotions in Reducing Anxiety

Despite the high level of anxiety, the study established that positive emotional events like encouragement, praise, enjoyment and recognition played a significant regulatory role. Respondents explained that even minor achievements, like the ability to answer a question correctly or get a smiling response from the teacher, provided a significant boost.

These small victories were used over time, and they would enable students to build resilience and diminish emotional resistance towards English. Participants described the reasons why pleasing learning experiences caused them to feel encouraged, freer to communicate, and not afraid of

errors. This is in line with the FLCA model, which holds that positive emotions expand the willingness of the students to communicate and enhance the overall learning performance.

Table 3. Positive Emotional Experiences Reported

Positive Factor	Effect on Learners
Teacher encouragement	Increased confidence and risk-taking
Enjoyable activities	Reduced anxiety and improved participation
Supportive peers	Created emotional safety
Small achievements	Strengthened long-term motivation

4.7. Coping Strategies Used by Students

The participants have shared several individual coping mechanisms they employed to deal with anxiety. These were extensive preparation of speaking activities, rehearsing with peers, rehearsing in the mind, answers and deep breathing. Other students used positive self-talk (I can do this), and the teacher helped some others. These strategies indicate that the students are active in controlling their emotions and are resilient to the emotional pressure they experience. The results are used to demonstrate that the feeling of English language anxiety in Pakistani students of the university is the result of the interplay of cognitive, social, and emotional processes. It is influenced by the relationship in a classroom, conditioned by previous experience, caused by specific tasks, and modulated by positive feelings. Anxiety is not fixed, but rather it varies as students interact with their environment, which is in line with the dynamic systems perspective of the FLCA model.

5. Discussion

According to the results of this research, it can be suggested that the English Language Learning Anxiety (ELLA) is a salient problem among Pakistani students at the university and is classroom-specific, which is supported by the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) model by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986). The findings indicate that anxiety in students is primarily determined by communication apprehension, fear of negative appraisal, and test anxiety, which are elicited by specific classroom experiences as opposed to being a personal trait.

In line with the FLCA framework, oral presentation, abrupt questioning, and high-stakes tests proved to be significant causes of anxiety. Students had mentioned that they experienced increased nervousness during speaking tasks because they feared committing grammatical or pronunciation mistakes and being embarrassed by the teachers or classmates. These results are consistent with past studies that indicate that communication anxiety and the fear of negative evaluation contribute significantly to the unwillingness of learners to engage in the English language classrooms. Less formal activities like pair work and small group discussions, on the contrary, were found to be perceived as less threatening, and this suggests that anxiety levels are reduced with less exposure to the public.

The paper also found that the previous negative learning experiences, including the ridicule or severe corrective feedback played on the current anxiety of the students. The experiences were added to the long-term fear of assessment and lack of confidence, which supported the FLCA perspective of finding that language anxiety is learned through recurrent classroom relations and evaluative experiences. These kinds of emotional background influence the willingness of learners to communicate and engage in English.

In general, the results indicate a close relationship between English language anxiety and the instructional practices, teacher feedback, peer responses, and evaluation procedures. When considering Pakistani universities, communication apprehension, minimizing negative assessment, and supportive, non-threatening classroom practices are the key components that can be used to reduce the level of anxiety and increase the confidence and involvement of students in learning the English language.

6. Conclusion

The paper has also mentioned the English language learning anxiety (ELLA) in Pakistani university students stating that it is dynamic, situation-specific, and emotionally multidimensional. Results have revealed that anxiety varies in relation to the classroom activity, with the highest levels occurring when students have an oral presentation, have to receive a sudden question, and have to show high levels of performance in examinations, and lower levels of anxiety when students feel in an appreciative and supportive environment and are involved in collaborative learning. Such trends support the ideas of the Horwitz & Cope's (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) model., which proves that the emotional conditions of learners are the result of the ongoing interplay of cognitive, social, and situational influences.

Negative past experiences, such as ridicule or harsh corrective feedback, were found to have a lasting impact on learners' current anxiety levels, confidence, and willingness to communicate in English. Within the framework of Horwitz and Cope's (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) model, these experiences contribute to heightened fear of negative evaluation, reinforcing anxiety during speaking and classroom participation. Such repeated evaluative experiences shape learners' perceptions of their language ability and reduce their confidence in using English. At the same time, the findings indicate that supportive classroom practices such as teacher encouragement, peer support, constructive feedback, and recognition of small achievements play an important role in reducing communication apprehension and test anxiety. When learners feel supported and less judged, their anxiety levels decrease, allowing greater engagement and participation in English language activities. This highlights the importance of creating a non-threatening classroom environment, as emphasized by the FLCA model.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of research on foreign language classroom anxiety by demonstrating that English language anxiety among Pakistani university students is closely linked to classroom interaction, evaluation practices, and emotional experiences. The findings suggest that effective English language instruction should not only address linguistic challenges but also minimize anxiety by fostering supportive teacher–student relationships and positive peer interactions. By reducing fear of negative evaluation and communication apprehension, educators can enhance learners' confidence, motivation, and long-term willingness to use English in academic contexts.

Future directions

A more varied sample in a larger size should be used in future studies to encompass more variations in English language learning anxiety in different parts of Pakistan. Longitudinal studies are required to trace the dynamics of anxiety and positive emotions throughout time in actual classroom interactions. Classroom observations and teacher interviews could also be included in future work to conduct a more efficient triangulation of the data. Experiencing that could be experimentally tested to understand what impact these conditions of positive psychology-based activities or anxiety-reduction strategies have on the emotional states of learners. Also, it would be worthwhile investigating the digital learning environment and its contribution to language anxiety development in the new educational setups.

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