



Uncovering the Determinants of English Language Anxiety among Undergraduate Learners in Pakistan: A Study at a Private University in Pakistan

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Abstract

English Language plays a crucial role in global communication across various domains. The objective of this study was to investigate English language anxiety among undergraduate learners at Pakistani private universities and explore the factors affecting language-related anxiety. The researchers assessed three demographic variables—age, gender, and years of English language learning—alongside three key aspects contributing to language anxiety: Test Anxiety, Fear of negative evaluation, and communication apprehension. Data were collected from one hundred undergraduate participants in the study using the English Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (ELCAS). Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, multiple regression, and correlation analysis. The data revealed a significant correlation between years of English language study and language anxiety. However, there was no relationship between gender, age, and English language anxiety. The multiple regression analysis revealed that the primary factor related to language anxiety is the fear of negative evaluation. The study underscores the importance of addressing the fear of negative evaluation as the critical factor in English language anxiety among Pakistani private university undergraduates and recommends tailored language programs and professional development for educators to create a supportive learning environment

1 Introduction

The English language has become an indispensable tool for international communication, facilitating interactions in diverse spheres such as business, social networking, and education on a global scale (Isro'iyah & Herminingsih, 2023; Manolescu, 2023). Its pervasive influence in almost every aspect of life has provided it a place as a second language and at times official language of the country (Wang et al., 2022). Extending it to the field of education, language policy has been put in place to enhance the learning of English across the country. It is suggested that English should not only be taught as a compulsory subject from Grade 1 onwards but should also serve as the medium of

instruction for content-related courses, such as mathematics and science, starting from Grade 4 and beyond in public schools (Ahmad et al.,2023). This initiative aims to improve English language proficiency and facilitate effective learning in these subjects. Despite receiving English language education for approximately a decade in schools, and English is widely taught as a compulsory subject in schools, particularly in urban areas and private institutions, many Pakistanis still grapple with effectively using the language in practical settings (Muhammad et al.,2023). One reason for this enduring challenge could be the role played by language anxiety in hindering language learning.

In the opening section of their book "Introduction to Psychology," published in 1979, Hilgard, Atkinson, and Atkinson delve into the concept of anxiety from a psychosomatic perspective. They commonly describe anxiety as a condition of discomfort and apprehension, a form of vague unease that is closely linked to a specific object or phenomenon. Another perspective interprets language anxiety as an instinctive response exhibited by the majority of language learners. This response has a detrimental effect on the language learning process and has become one of the extensively researched factors within the field of educational psychology. Horwitz et al. (1986) introduced the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), a helpful tool for measuring anxiety when learning a language.

The FLCAS identifies three main factors contributing to language anxiety. Firstly, "Communication Apprehension" refers to the anxiety and shyness that impede social engagement, listening comprehension, and spoken language learning. Second, "Test Anxiety" is defined as nervousness about academic assessments and the fear of performing poorly on language examinations. This can lead to additional stress and pressure during language exams, impairing proficiency development. Lastly, the "Fear of Negative Evaluation" focuses on anxiety about others' perceptions of you and the expectation of unfavorable evaluations, which makes you feel self-conscious and prevents you from actively participating in language. The present study investigates the levels of English language anxiety among undergraduate learners of a private university in Pakistan. Understanding the dynamics of language anxiety among this specific group is essential, as adult learners often encounter unique challenges and experience varied levels of motivation compared to young learners.

1.1 Research Objectives

The current research intends to evaluate undergraduate students' English language anxiety levels at Pakistani private universities. It investigates whether the degree of anxiety that learners experience when learning the English language is correlated with their details, such as age, gender, and years of English language study. Furthermore, the study aims to identify the predominant aspect of language-related anxiety that most significantly affects undergraduate learners as they develop their English language proficiency. The following research questions will be explored.

RQ1: To what extent do undergraduate learners at Pakistani universities in the private sector feel anxious when learning English?

RQ2: Do the demographics of learners—their age, gender, and length of time studying English have an impact on how anxious they are?

RQ3: Which aspect of language anxiety has the most significant impact on undergraduate learners' English language learning among general anxiety, fear of being evaluated negatively, and communication anxiety?

This research valuably contributes to the field of ESL teaching and learning, specifically in understanding the challenges faced by undergraduate learners concerning language anxiety. By uncovering the factors influencing language-related anxiety and their impact on English language learning, educators and policymakers can develop targeted strategies and interventions to create a supportive language-learning environment for undergraduate learners in the classrooms and beyond. Additionally, the results of this research may have implications for enhancing language learning experiences, ultimately fostering language proficiency and enabling the use of target language with ease among adult learners.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Anxiety in Second/Foreign Language Learning

Fear, tension, or anxiety can seriously impede students' language learning and have a detrimental effect on their performance when learning a second or foreign language (Rasool et al., 2023). Kormos and Smith (2023) have examined the significant psychological obstacles linked to language learning, which pose a direct risk to a person's worldview and sense of self. Language learning anxiety, according to Akhmad et al. (2023), is a psychological disorder that stems from learners' experiences and self-related ideas. It affects their nervous system, which in turn affects their emotions and their capacity to learn a new language (Fındıklı & Büyükkaracı, 2023). According to Horwitz et al. (1986), anxiety in language learning is further classified as a distinct reaction that occurs exclusively in specific contexts linked to language acquisition. This perspective is supported by MacIntyre (1999), who defines situation-specific anxiety as occurring in particular situations, especially when second language learners must use the language while they are learning it. According to Krashen (1985;1998), language learners are more successful when they are in a positive emotional state and less successful when they are anxious, stressed, or have a "high affective filter." Krashen defines this effective filter as representing the emotional and psychological factors that can either facilitate or impede language learning. The increased anxiety in language learners can harm the language learning process, making it less efficient and potentially leading to slower progress or reduced proficiency.

Anxiety is an area of discussion in second language (L2) learning because it affects L2 learners significantly (Horwitz et al., 1986; Price, 1991). According to Pappi and Khjavy (2023), language anxiety concerning a variety of L2 learning skills is a constant problem for teachers and may impede the most effective teaching and learning procedures in the classroom. Furthermore, Zhou et al. (2023) conclude that extreme language anxiety could hinder the development of second language proficiency by causing further problems with self-worth, confidence, and risk-taking skills.

Another factor in language anxiety is the difference in socio-cultural settings of the learners' native and target language. Hakim (2019) explored the factors affecting the learning process of a second language. It has been noticed that the social context, along with a feeling of alienation, can also evoke language anxiety. In cultures where linguistic

competence is heavily linked to social status or where mistakes are stigmatized, anxiety is a formidable language-learning barrier (Riaz & Riaz, 2023).

2.2 Language Anxiety and Gender

Studies on the relationship between language anxiety and gender have revealed that women frequently experience higher levels of anxiety than men (Shukri et al., 2009; Yeşilçınar & Erdemir, 2023). Research suggests that women's higher social orientation, better verbal abilities, and adherence to language and academic norms could cause this discrepancy (Liu, 2022). These benefits are considered a factor in their improved language learning abilities. Other research, however, has revealed that women might naturally be more anxious than men (Fattahi & Coucci, 2022). The belief that women are more reserved than men can exacerbate their nervousness in a variety of circumstances. It is essential to understand that although there is a general tendency for females to have higher levels of anxiety, this link may be mediated by other factors. This emphasizes how crucial it is to treat language anxiety using a thorough strategy considering each person's unique experiences.

Siahpoosh et al. (2022) investigated gender disparities in the satisfaction and anxiety of speaking a foreign language in an online learning environment among bilingual Azari-Persian students studying English as a third language. The study found that whereas male learners showed distinct patterns, female learners simultaneously had high levels of foreign language enjoyment (FLE) and foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA). The dynamic character of emotions in language learning is clarified by this research, which also emphasizes the need to strike a balance between FLSA and FLE to support effective language instruction—particularly in online contexts.

Similarly, Piniel and Zolyomi's meta-analysis included 48 research that used the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to examine the connection between gender and language anxiety among language learners of foreign languages. The results indicate that while women have been found to have higher levels of anxiety connected to learning a foreign language, these differences were not statistically significant. This highlights the complex relationship between gender and language anxiety and suggests that

additional personal, societal, and environmental factors may significantly shape experiences with language anxiety.

Bernat and Lloyd (2007) looked at how gender affects the attitudes of English language learners toward language acquisition in the setting of language learning. According to their research, men were more likely than women to enjoy practicing their English with native speakers. Nevertheless, some research has not discovered any appreciable variations in communication anxiety levels between the sexes. According to Kutuk et al. (2022), gender differences have no discernible impact on how each gender reacts to specific scenarios in language classes. Instead, both genders typically react in similar ways to these situations. Mahfuzah Rafek (2009) provides more evidence in favor of this theory when she notes that participants in her study showed comparable symptoms of anxiety, such as tightness and trepidation, during a language class, independent of gender differences. These results demonstrate the nuanced and varied nature of the connection between gender and linguistic anxiety.

2.3 Language Anxiety and Age

Age affects many aspects of language anxiety, including cognitive styles, learning capacities, and experience habits (Raza et al.,2023). While linguistic anxiety in pre-schoolers and adolescents may be similar to that of adults, Sila (2010) contends that different age groups' cognitive methods differ significantly. This aligns with the critical period hypothesis of Penfield and Roberts (1959), where there is an optimal period for language acquisition, and as age increases, the ability to acquire a new language declines. Evidence from recent studies such as Johnson and Newport (2020) and Khan (2022) suggests that younger learners may exhibit more remarkable language learning aptitude. On the contrary, other researchers like DeKeyser (2022) argue that while age may influence the learning process, adults can still achieve high proficiency in a second language with effective instructional methods. This debate underscores the complexity of age-related cognitive differences in language learning. Butler (2023) explored the concept further, providing valuable insights for educators and language practitioners and informing the development of tailored instructional methods that cater to the cognitive needs of diverse age cohorts in language learning contexts. Adults learn best from rules and clear directions, whereas children learn best from examples. Moreover, adult learners differ from other age groups in

playing various roles that might influence more beneficial societal values, behavior, and thought patterns (Faizah et al., 2007). Compared to younger learners, adult learners may experience various effects on their language anxiety due to their varied learning experiences and past knowledge.

The duration of English language acquisition as it pertains to language anxiety is another area related to language anxiety. The conventional assumption that prolonged exposure to language learning environments leads to decreased anxiety levels is grounded in the idea that familiarity and increased experience foster a sense of comfort and confidence among learners. This perspective aligns with the Affective Filter Hypothesis proposed by Krashen (1985), where a positive and relaxed emotional state is conducive to effective language acquisition. According to Krashen, a low affective filter associated with reduced anxiety allows for optimal language learning by facilitating the absorption of linguistic input. Additionally, studies such as MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) have explored the impact of positive emotional states, emphasizing the role of a supportive learning environment in reducing anxiety and enhancing language acquisition. As a learner becomes more accustomed to the language learning environments, it is generally accepted that the longer they have been studying English, the less worry they may feel. However, this notion is not universally accepted as Rezazadeh and Travokoli's (2009) subsequent study casts doubt on this idea, arguing that there may be no significant correlation between test anxiety and the duration of language learning. This divergence in findings underscores the need for a comprehensive examination of the complex dynamics between time spent in language learning environments and the fluctuations in anxiety levels. According to recent literature, the complexity of these dynamics may involve individual differences, varying learning environments, and distinct teaching methodologies (Mao, 2023; Ahmed et al., 2023). Zhang et al. (2022) delve into the specific mechanisms at play, exploring how learner characteristics, teaching approaches, and contextual factors interact to shape the temporal trajectory of anxiety in language learners. This nuanced understanding is crucial for refining pedagogical strategies and developing targeted interventions that effectively address and manage anxiety throughout language learning experiences.

2.4 Language Anxiety and Self Perceptions

Language anxiety and self-perception are intricately linked to learning a language. Zhang (2019) thorough meta-analysis described the complex relationship between language anxiety and self-perception in the context of language acquisition. According to the author, the complex relationship between language anxiety and self-perception affects learners' cognitive processes, memory, and attention spans multiple aspects and goes beyond the performance itself. Cognitive variables might shape learners' perceptions of their competence and ability in the target language. Heightened language anxiety can also cause learners to believe they are less competent, which can harm their motivation and attitude. This might then start a vicious cycle by reinforcing emotions of inadequacy.

Another comprehensive review by Naser Oteir and Nijr Al-Otaibi (2019) emphasizes linguistic familiarity's role in anxiety and self-perception. The degree to which learners believe their native language and the target language are similar or different can significantly affect how they perceive their capacity to learn a language. It is critical for educators and students to acknowledge and comprehend the complex interactions between language anxiety and self-perception. This knowledge can help build techniques to deal with anxiety-related problems and foster a more optimistic view of oneself, which can ultimately improve language acquisition.

Horwitz and Cope (1986) developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), which served as the foundation for this investigation. With the specific goal of analyzing the anxiety that foreign language learners felt in a classroom context, this research tool identified three main factors: a general feeling of anxiety, communication apprehension, and fear of receiving a negative evaluation. Later studies have explored the complex relationships between students' anxiety levels and their views and beliefs about language learning, including one conducted by Masahiko Goshi in 2005. Utilizing the FLCAS, Goshi's research measured students' anxiety levels and found associations with how they perceived the process of learning a language.

Furthermore, a study by Wang et al. (2023) examined coping mechanisms along with students' anxiety levels and how they relate to learning a foreign language during covid 19. The study identified several anxiety-provoking variables, such as the fear of making

mistakes, the fear of looking foolish, the fear of failing, and the worry of falling short of predetermined language competency requirements.

Khan and Zafar (2010) investigated how anxiety-provoking stimuli affected students' performance during pre-, during-, and post-learning phases of the learning process. According to the research, students' anxiety levels significantly increased when they realized a camera was recording them, which negatively impacted their performance. In addition, several studies carried out in a variety of educational contexts, including Brantmeier (2005), Elkhafaiji (2005), Gregersen and Horwitz (2002), Casado and Dereshiwsky (2001), Hanafiah et al. (2022), Zhou et al. (2023) have demonstrated that a variety of English language skill activities, including writing assignments, oral presentations, listening exercises, reading exercises, and grammar exercises, can give rise to language anxiety. As mentioned by Young (1991) and Bailey (1983), some research has also identified specific causes of linguistic anxiety, such as the fear of failing, perceived proficiency, and competitiveness. Similarly, Herrero and Sanchez (1992) found a significant correlation between linguistic anxiety and performance, showing that elevated anxiety negatively impacts students' general performance. The overall findings highlight the significance of addressing these issues in language education and provide insightful information on the complex relationship between language anxiety and self-perception.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

The work draws its theoretical foundation from Krashen's Monitor Model, a comprehensive second-language learning theory. Gong (2023) claims that Krashen's paradigm consists of five main hypotheses. 1) learning-acquisition Hypothesis where there lies a difference between Language learning and language acquisition. 2) Contrary to the order of instruction in formal settings, the Natural Order Hypothesis proposes that language rules are learned in a predictable sequence. 3) The Monitor Hypothesis contends that Learners can adjust and change the language they produce by using the knowledge they have consciously learned. 4) According to the Input Hypothesis, language is learned when learners are subject to "comprehensible input" that is only marginally more advanced than their present proficiency (L+1). 5) The Affective Filter Hypothesis examines how affective elements such as motivation, anxiety, and self-assurance influence language learning. Krashen claimed that highly motivated students who are self-assured, have a positive self-

image, and experience low anxiety levels are more likely to succeed in learning a second language, as Zhang (2022) indicates. The Affective Filter Hypothesis, in particular, explores how these psychological and emotional elements influence language learning and emphasizes the importance of fostering an encouraging and less stressful atmosphere to promote efficient language learning. Chen (2022) remarks that this affective filter impacts learners' psychological and emotional factors, including motivation, self-confidence, and experienced anxiety. All three factors combined affect the learner's language proficiency development. Mengli (2020) categorizes motivation as integrative and instrumental, where instrumental motivation is driven by the learning desire to acquire the target language sufficiently to secure employment opportunities. In contrast, integrative motivation stems from the learner's practical need to communicate with native or proficient speakers effectively. Learners' self-confidence also plays a crucial role in the developmental phase of a second language. Chen (2022) remarks that self-confidence can lead to a positive evaluation of oneself along with the objective assessment of one's level and ability in the target language. Wang and Zhan (2021) indicate that anxiety encompasses emotions, including nervousness, apprehension, and fear, arising from learners' challenges in comprehending both language and culture. Feifei (2021) further categorizes anxiety into two existent forms in learners: facilitative anxiety and avoidance anxiety. Conducive anxiety has the potential to channel stress positively, converting it into motivation, fostering a determined attitude, and cultivating a positive mindset to confront challenges and accomplish learning tasks. On the contrary, avoidance anxiety may result in reluctance or avoidance of learning, ultimately leading to the failure to complete learning tasks. The current study employs the framework of avoidance anxiety to comprehend English language classroom anxiety and its manifestations among language learners.

3 Methodology

The research employed a quantitative survey design to investigate the experiences and perceptions of adult ESL learners, focusing on 100 undergraduate students in a private-sector university in Pakistan. The survey design facilitated broad data collection, enabling statistical analysis for generalizability and practicality. A convenience sampling approach was utilized for participant selection, ensuring efficiency within the specified context. The inclusion criterion restricted participants to those enrolled in any undergraduate degree program at the institute, capturing the experiences of actively engaged English language

learners at the undergraduate level. Ethical considerations were prioritized, with participants providing informed consent and maintaining confidentiality and anonymity throughout the study. Data collection utilized the adapted Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale by Horwitz (1986), consisting of 33 items on a 5-point Likert Scale, focusing on the English language (ELCAS). The questionnaire covered demographic characteristics, specifying gender, age, and duration of studying English as a subject. The later section measured communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and general feelings of anxiety among participants.

3.1 Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection process for the study took place over four weeks. The study's objective was explained to the students before the data collection procedure, and their consent to participate was acquired. The English Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (ELCAS) questionnaire was shared and randomly distributed to undergraduate students at private sector universities in Pakistan via Google Forms once it was confirmed that the students understood the study's requirements. A quantitative analysis was performed on the acquired data, highlighting the various anxiety levels that students in English language lessons encountered. Three groups—High (1.00-2.50), Moderate (2.51-3.50), and Low (3.51-5.00)—were created from these levels. High, Moderate, and Low.

Table 1 Mean Value for Anxiety Level

Anxiety level	Mean Value (Range)
High	From 1.00 to 2.50
Moderate	From 2.51 to 3.50
Low	From 3.51 to 5.00

Statistical analysis of the data was performed using SPSS version 24, presenting the results in the form of descriptive statistics, including mean scores. The items in the questionnaire were converted to numerical values for statistical analysis, and scoring for negatively-worded items was reversed accordingly. Descriptive measures, such as frequency and percentage, along with mean scores and standard deviation, were used for common measurements in descriptive analysis. Furthermore, inferential data analysis, specifically Multiple Regression, was employed to identify the most influential factor of language anxiety among the three factors Horwitz et al. (1986) identified: communication

apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and general feeling of anxiety. The correlation between variables was also assessed to determine the relationships between them.

4 Findings

This section presents the findings from three main objectives: the first assessed the anxiety levels of undergraduate students at a private university in Pakistan as they learned English; the second examined the correlation between the students' demographics (gender, age, and years of English learning) and the degree of language anxiety they encountered; and the third identified the main factor causing language anxiety in language learners.

4.1 Level of Anxiety

Table 2 provides an overview of these groups' typical anxiety levels. The average anxiety levels are represented by the means (M), the number of respondents in each group is indicated by the sample sizes (N), and the variability or spread in anxiety levels within each group is measured by the standard deviations (SD). Fifty-nine out of the 100 respondents were female, and the mean descriptive table indicates that there were 51 male respondents. There is no difference in the degree of anxiety experienced by men and women. Both males ($m=2.7$) and females ($m=2.8$) report feeling somewhat anxious when studying English. In addition, 42 students were younger than the (17–20) age range, and 58 students were older than the (21–25) age range. The findings indicate that there is no variation in anxiety levels by age group. A moderate amount of anxiety is experienced by both age groups when learning English.

Table 2 Mean descriptive

Demographic	M	N	SD
Gender			
Male	2.7647	51	0.80151
Female	2.8776	49	0.80993
Age Group			
17-20	2.9484	42	0.77956
21-25	2.7270	58	0.81452

Average levels of anxiety among different gender and age-groups of the undergraduate students (N=100)

4.2 Level of Anxiety According to Gender

The data in Table 3 indicates a very slight negative association (correlation coefficient: -0.070) between language anxiety and gender. There are two different significance levels: $**p < .01$ and $*p < .05$. The results suggest that the degree of language anxiety and an individual's gender do not significantly correlate. The findings (p-value greater than 0.05 and correlation coefficient around zero) demonstrate that gender has little to no effect on language anxiety.

Table 3 Correlation between language anxiety and gender

Variables	1	2
1. Language Anxiety	-	
2. Gender	-0.070	-

Note N=100 $*p < .05$. $**p < .01$.

4.3 Language Anxiety and Age

Table 4 shows a weak negative correlation ($r = -0.078$). This suggests that age has no to little effect on language anxiety. Hence, we cannot conclude that language anxiety is related to the learner's age.

Table 4 Correlation between language anxiety and age group

Variables	1	2
1. Language Anxiety	-	
2. Age group	-0.078**	-

Note N=100 $*p < .05$. $**p < .01$.

4.4 Language Anxiety and Years of Learning English

Table 5 indicates a significant association between Year of Study and Language Anxiety. These variables are strongly linked according to the moderately negative ($-0.509**$) correlation coefficient. It demonstrates that language anxiety levels are significantly influenced by the length of time spent learning English. Language anxiety tends to lessen with increasing English learning time. This indicates that compared to students who are just beginning their language acquisition journey, students who have been

immersed in English learning for a longer length of time usually have lower levels of anxiety.

Table 5 Correlation between language anxiety and year of study

Variables	1	2
1. Language Anxiety	-	
2. Year of study	-0.509**	-

Note N=100 *p<.05. **p<.01.

Since the intercept of the regression model is insignificant (sig value > 5%), (b0= -0.001, T= -0.310, sig=0.757). Therefore, we cannot incorporate the intercept in the final regression equation. The standardized beta of fear of negative evaluation is 0.467; communication apprehension is 0.365; test anxiety is 0.108. This suggests that the fear of negative evaluation (IV) has a higher predictive ability to predict language anxiety (DV). This means that fear of negative evaluation has a higher impact on language learning anxiety as compared to the other IVs. Hence, we can say that language anxiety is influenced by the fear of negative evaluation by 46.7%. Moreover, 36.5 variations in language anxiety are influenced by communication comprehension, whereas test anxiety has the most negligible impact on language anxiety, which is 10.8%. The coefficient of fear of negative evaluation is (b0=0.467, T= 22.068, sig= 0.000). The coefficient of communication apprehension is (b0= 0.365, T= 19.692communication apprehension emerges as another influential factor, with a standardized beta value of 0.365. , sig= 0.000). The coefficient of test anxiety is (b0= 0.108, T= 10.244, sig= 0.000).

Hence, our final regression equation would be:

Language anxiety= 0.467 fear of negative evaluation + 0.365 communication apprehension + 0.108 test anxiety

Table 6 Regression analysis

Variable	Unstandardized B	Coefficient SE	Standardized Coefficient Beta	t	p
1. (Constant)	0.131	0.041		3.220	0.002
2. Fear of negative evaluation	0.467	0.021	0.539	22.068	0.000
3. Communication apprehension	0.365	0.019	0.446	19.692	0.000
4. Test anxiety	0.108	0.011	0.181	10.244	0.000

The findings of this study provide a meaningful understanding of the factors influencing language anxiety among the participants, which aligns with previous research. The analysis of the regression model reveals that fear of negative evaluation has the highest predictive ability in determining language anxiety.

5 Discussion

The findings of this study challenge certain aspects of language anxiety stated in the body of literature. It implies that there is no significant correlation between language anxiety and gender and that language anxiety is a common occurrence for both male and female students. This conclusion contradicts multiple prior research that has found an association between gender and linguistic distress, with women frequently experiencing higher levels of anxiety than men (Kamarul Shukri et al., 2009; Yeşilçnar & Erdemir, 2023). Several characteristics, such as women's more excellent social orientation and adherence to linguistic and academic norms, have been suggested as causes of gender-based differences in language anxiety.

Moreover, the strong inverse correlation observed between the duration of language learning and language anxiety substantiates the assertion that individuals with limited exposure and familiarity with the target language frequently experience heightened levels of anxiety during the language acquisition process. As the duration of language learning extends, a natural reduction in anxiety becomes apparent. This correlation can be attributed to many factors, including the distinctive cognitive styles prevalent among diverse age groups and variations in learning capacities, as Sila (2010) noted. Notably, the findings conclude that age has little to no effect on language learning anxiety. However, older learners with more exposure may exhibit lower levels of language anxiety than their younger counterparts with less exposure, a phenomenon attributed to their diverse life experiences, pre-existing knowledge bases, and distinct social positions, as Faizah et al. (2007) remarked. This emphasizes how crucial it is to introduce language gradually and provide lots of practice and engagement opportunities while teaching language. Nonetheless, as research by Rezazadeh and Travokoli (2009) suggests, it's critical to recognize the complexity of the relationship between the length of language acquisition and language anxiety.

The understanding of language anxiety is further described through regression analysis. It draws attention to three essential variables that are linked to language anxiety: Test anxiety, communication apprehension, and fear of negative evaluation (Almusharraf & Bailey, 2023). The fear of negative evaluation is revealed to be the most influential among them, emphasizing the necessity of resolving students' fears about making mistakes or being negatively appraised.

Literature also supports the idea that children or young learners faceless anxiety when acquiring a language (Yousefabadi et al., 2022). This is partly because adults are often more concerned about making mistakes and being negatively evaluated by peers or teachers during language learning activities. Moreover, the different levels of anxiety experienced can also be attributed to the difference in language learning and language acquisition processes. The literature also highlights teachers' pivotal role in fostering a supportive and conducive learning atmosphere (Kilag et al., 2023). By cultivating an environment where language learners feel encouraged to make mistakes without the fear of negative evaluation, language teachers can effectively alleviate fear-induced language anxiety. This emphasizes the significance of creating a safe space for learners to take risks, express themselves, and confidently engage in language learning, ultimately contributing to more positive and practical experiences.

6 Conclusion, Limitations, and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

The indicated findings of this study imply that ESL students experience no change in anxiety levels based on their age. However, this changes with the increase in the duration of language learning. This can be attributed to the high motivation and self-efficacy observed in learners with more exposure and familiarity, enabling them to address learning challenges independently and manage feelings of nervousness. Additionally, their maturity and positive attitude towards language learning contribute to a conducive second language learning environment. The research shows no significant difference in anxiety levels based on gender, indicating that anxiety remains unaffected by this factor. Overall, the fear of negative evaluation has turned out to be the leading cause of language anxiety among the respondents.

6.2 Limitations and Recommendations

Although this study offers valuable insights, it is essential to recognize and address certain limitations. A significant limitation of the study is the limited number of respondents involved in the research, which may impact the findings' generalizability to a larger population. With only 100 participants from a single private sector university in Pakistan, the study's results may not fully represent the diverse range of language learners in different educational settings and regions. Additionally, the study's cross-sectional design may not capture language anxiety's dynamic and fluctuating nature over an extended period. Longitudinal studies with more extensive and diverse participant samples would offer more robust and comprehensive insights into the factors influencing language anxiety. Furthermore, relying solely on a self-reported questionnaire may introduce response bias, as some participants may not accurately represent their true feelings of anxiety. Future studies can consider using multiple data collection methods, such as interviews or observation, to gain an in-depth insight into the experiences that the learners go through while having language anxiety.

Considering this research's results and final insights, various suggestions can be put forward for ESL educators and their students in private-sector universities in Pakistan or similar institutions, aiming to foster a more favorable learning atmosphere. Identifying effective methods to increase learning motivation and enhance self-confidence among students is crucial in reducing anxiety, particularly for those facing difficulties learning English. Implementing appropriate teaching-learning techniques is vital in ensuring a conducive learning atmosphere in the language classroom. While the majority of respondents experienced moderate levels of anxiety during the English class, lecturers need to be mindful of students who may encounter higher levels of anxiety. Whether formal or informal, evaluations require sensitivity towards students' feelings, especially as second language learning may evoke a sense of insecurity and lack of confidence. Employing indirect evaluation methods can help alleviate students' anxieties and foster a more supportive learning environment for English language learners.

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