Unveiling the Presence of Speech Anxiety: A Case of English as an Additional Language

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Abstract

This study explores speech anxiety in students learning English as an additional language (EAL) in a university setting. Addressing classroom speech anxiety among university students is paramount for fostering supportive learning environments and ensuring academic success (Horwitz, 2001). Reducing classroom speech anxiety boosts students' confidence and persuasive communication skills, which are crucial for professional success (McCroskey, 1982). This research examined the many elements that influence classroom speaking anxiety in students at the University of Education Lahore. The theoretical foundation of this research was the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986). The questionnaire consisted of 25 items and was delivered to the Bachelor of Science (BS) English department students. One hundred and three students responded to the questionnaire. Data was analyzed quantitatively using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16, which was launched in 2007. Results show that there is significant speech anxiety in students based on their demographic background. The analysis of an open-ended question included in the questionnaire reveals that psychologically, students think they have less competence than their fellow students, followed by other psychological factors like fear of judgment and peer comparison. It is recommended that EAL instructors should implement strategies aimed at lowering students' anxiety levels so they can perform to the best of their abilities.

Keywords: Classroom Speech Anxiety, English as an Additional Language, English Teaching.

Introduction

Learners face particular difficulties and concerns when acquiring a second language (L2), particularly regarding speaking abilities. According to Liu (2006), anxiety hurts students' performance in the target language, especially in classrooms teaching foreign or second languages. Hamid (2014) found that while EAL and English as a foreign language (EFL) learners perform better in reading, writing, and listening, they struggle with speaking. Speech anxiety hampers language learning, especially in second language contexts, as students may shy away from speaking tasks due to fear of errors and criticism, inhibiting their linguistic advancement (Horwitz, 2001; McCroskey, 2015).

Understanding and resolving students' speech anxiety is critical for improving their academic performance, language competency, and general well-being. Educators can use targeted

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interventions to build supportive learning environments that promote successful communication and overall student development by examining the prevalence and factors contributing to classroom speech anxiety. Language anxiety, particularly in spoken language, is a significant element affecting language learners' confidence and competency. Therefore, it is necessary to identify it and take steps to remove it. While there has been a recent increase in research on Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA), no significant study has been done in the context of the University of Education. A similar study was conducted by Rasool et al. (2023), but they only examined writing anxiety.

To determine classroom speech anxiety, Horwitz et al. (1986) FLCAS model made significant contributions to the identification and classification of the various anxiety disorders connected to language acquisition.

Horwitz et al. (1986) divided anxiety and fear into three categories:

1. Anxiety is connected to verbal communication.
2. Test anxiety
3. Fear of a negative evaluation

Verbal communication is the type of anxiety brought on by the expectation that one must be able to speak well in the target language. Notably, when their language proficiency and knowledge are lacking, learners frequently feel uncomfortable speaking in the classroom because they believe their speech will be evaluated. When speaking in the target language is required, learners experience higher anxiety, which makes them hesitant to engage in verbal conversations and self-conscious of their language skills (McCroskey, 2015).

Horwitz et al. (1986) defined test anxiety as a particular kind of performance anxiety resulting from a fear of making a mistake, especially while speaking orally. This nervousness stems from the fear of not doing well enough on speaking tasks, which are often crucial components of language assessments and go beyond the test.

Fear of a negative evaluation: This anxiety is about receiving harmful or destructive reviews from the audience. According to Watson & Friend (1969), this involves a significant concern for other people's perceptions of you and a fear of receiving negative feedback. This type of anxiety is experienced by language learners who are overly concerned about being negatively assessed for their linguistic mistakes, even though making mistakes is a normal part of learning a language.

Research Questions

- What is the prevalence of speech anxiety among English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners?
- How consistent is speech anxiety across different stages of language learning among EAL learners?
- What impact do demographic factors have on speech anxiety among EAL learners?

The research aims to investigate three main questions: the prevalence of speech anxiety among English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners, the consistency of this anxiety across different language learning stages, and the influence of demographic factors on speech anxiety within this group.

Literature Review

Speech anxiety in second language acquisition has been a subject of extensive research, given its profound impact on learners' proficiency and confidence. The seminal work of Horwitz et al. (1986) introduced the concept of foreign language anxiety, specifically addressing three central

components: test anxiety, communication comprehension, and fear of negative evaluation. The literature consistently shows that speech anxiety in second language learning is multifaceted and deeply rooted in psychological, social, and educational factors.

Watson and Friend (1969) state that people avoid social interaction due to negative evaluations. This facet of language anxiety, as described by MacIntyre and Gardner (1994), relates to the fear or apprehension experienced by individuals when expected to communicate in a second language. They argue that this form of anxiety directly impacts learners' willingness to communicate and can hinder language development. The apprehension is often rooted in a fear of making errors and being judged, as supported by Young (1991), who emphasizes the social nature of this anxiety. In the context of language learning, test anxiety extends beyond general academic anxiety, encompassing fears specific to language performance evaluations. Aida (1994) focuses on the relationship between linguistic anxiety and learning Japanese. The study found that test anxiety in language learning could significantly affect students' performance, particularly in oral assessments, where spontaneous language use is required. This is consistent with Horwitz et al.'s (1986) assertion that test anxiety is a distinct form of performance anxiety in language learning.

Watson and Friend (1969) highlight the learners' concern about being negatively judged by others, especially regarding language competence. Cheng et al. (1999) explored this dimension, suggesting that fear of negative evaluation can lead to avoidance behaviors, further limiting language practice and improvement opportunities. Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) extended the conversation by exploring the physiological manifestations of language anxiety, linking it to broader theories of anxiety and stress. Their work suggests that physiological responses to anxiety, such as increased heart rate or sweating, can exacerbate feelings of discomfort.

Recent studies continue to explore these dimensions. For instance, Tercan and Dikilitaş (2015) conducted a study at a private university preparatory school in Turkey. The findings demonstrate that a range of factors, including speaking, preparation, question-answering, testing, discussion, public speaking, and error correction, all contribute to speaking anxiety in English among university students.

Toubot et al. (2018) conducted a study in Malaysia and revealed that students' speaking anxiety for EFL was moderate to severe. Another study was conducted in Indonesia by Damayanti and Listyani (2020) using the Horwitz model. The findings show that students lack competence and are afraid of making mistakes.

Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) have examined how these anxieties vary in different learning environments and among diverse learner populations. They underscore the complexity of these anxieties, influenced by factors like personality, culture, and teaching methodologies.

Muktiningrum et al. (2024) conducted a study to determine the classroom speech anxiety between male and female students in Indonesia. Muslim Maros University's English Department students were chosen as the research sample. Results show that there was a statistically significant difference in foreign language anxiety levels between male and female students. This study found that female students experience more anxiety than male students. Student anxiety is primarily caused by communication apprehension, particularly among female students.

Rasool et al. (2023) conducted a study in the context of UE (Multan) to determine writing anxiety. The sample of this study was prep-class students in the English language teachers training department at UE (Multan). The study revealed that students have a fear of negative judgment and a lack of self-confidence in writing anxiety.

Hussain (2020) found out from 14 English medium schools in Multan that anxiety is affecting the students' performance due to the opposite gender. Anwar (2023) conducted a study among English

as an additional language learner at Sardar Bahadur Khan Women's University located in Quetta, Pakistan. She found out that 1st-semester students have more anxiety issues and panic attacks as compared to 8th-semester students. Shahbaz (2021) found out in the context of The Women University Multan that students have classroom writing and speaking anxiety.

Sana et al. (2024) conducted a study on the Impact of Students' Speaking Anxiety on Self-efficacy at the University Level. The population for that research study was the students of the social science department at Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan. The research showed that students often feel nervous when they speak English in different situations. This nervousness affects their academic performance, confidence, and participation in classroom activities.

No significant study was conducted to determine speech anxiety in the context of the University of Education Lahore (Multan). The importance of this research lies in its comprehensive examination of speech anxiety in the context of learning English as an Additional Language (EAL). This study holds significant implications and contributions to the academic and practical aspects of language education. By applying Horwitz et al. (1986) as a framework, this study adds to our understanding of the psychological factors of learning a language. It provides empirical evidence on how speech anxiety manifests among EAL learners. It provides insights into the complicated ways that several factors, including gender, educational background, and semester of study, influence anxiety levels.

Methodology

This is case study research undertaken at the University of Education Lahore (Multan). Horwitz et al.'s (1986) foreign language speech anxiety scale was used due to its high value of validity and reliability. This research holds both quantitative methodologies. FLCAS was modified to meet the needs of this research. Specific components were removed according to contextual demands, as the study was conducted in Pakistan's EAL environment. SPSS tested the validity and the reliability of the scale.

Table 1: Reliability statistics

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Likert scale questions for speech anxiety	.870	25

Cronbach alpha of 0.870 suggests that the set of items is internally consistent in measuring aspects related to classroom speech anxiety. It shows that there is an association between items.

The primary tool for data collection was a questionnaire distributed to English students at the University of Education (Multan). Google Forms was the source of the distribution of questionnaires among the enrolled students. There were two sections in the Google Forms. The first section consisted of structured questions aimed at gathering demographic information. The second section carries the 25 items of Horwitz et al.'s FLCAS with an open-ended question designed to elicit qualitative responses regarding personal experiences with speech anxiety. It included items measuring confidence, nervousness, and anxiety related to speaking English. Responses were captured on a Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." At the end of the questionnaire, an open-ended question was asked to get detailed information and to collect students' views about speech anxiety in the class.

The quantitative data were analyzed using the statistical software SPSS to determine mean anxiety levels and variance and to perform cross-tabulation with demographic data. The analysis involved

Assigning numerical values to Likert scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree) responses, calculating an overall anxiety score for each participant, and performing Chi-square tests to examine the association between categorical demographic variables and levels of speech anxiety and calculating descriptive statistics (mean, frequency) for demographic data and anxiety scores. ANOVA test was performed to assess classroom speech anxiety across different semesters. The total anxiety score for each participant was calculated by summing these scores. These total scores were then analyzed to find the average (mean) anxiety score. Thematic analysis was performed on qualitative responses.

The study followed the ethical guidelines. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and consent was obtained. Confidentiality and anonymity of responses were maintained throughout the study.

Results and Discussions

The descriptive statistics provide a foundational understanding of the sample demo figures and the participants' general pattern of speech anxiety. This information sets the stage for more detailed inferential statistical analyses to explore the relationships between these demographic factors and speech anxiety levels.

The initial phase of data analysis involved computing descriptive statistics with demographic variables. The values according to the gender are shown in table 2 and figure 1.

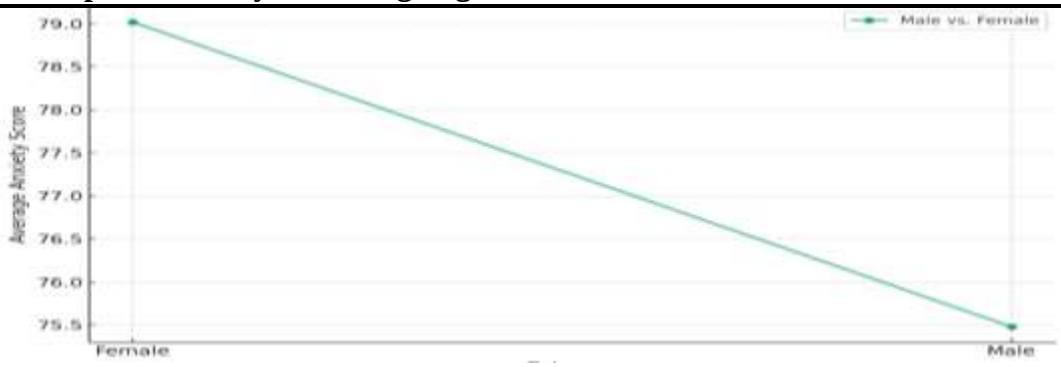
Table 2: Descriptive analysis according to gender

Gender	Frequency	Per cent	Valid percent
Female	45	43.7	43.7
Male	58	56.3	56.3
Total	103	100.0	100.0

In the table 2, out of 103 students, there are more males (56.3%) than females (43.7%). This shows a slightly higher participation or enrollment of male students in the context being studied. These statistics offer an overview of the sample characteristics.

To determine the amount of speech anxiety between semesters, responses to questionnaire questions on a Likert scale were transformed into numerical values ranging from 1 strongly agree to 5 strongly disagree. The total anxiety score for each participant was calculated by summing these scores. These total scores were then analyzed for each variable's average (mean) anxiety score. Variables are gender, background, institute, job, and semester. Inferential statistics were applied to determine the classroom speech anxiety between the two genders, and the results are given below in figure 1.

Figure 1: Speech anxiety according to gender



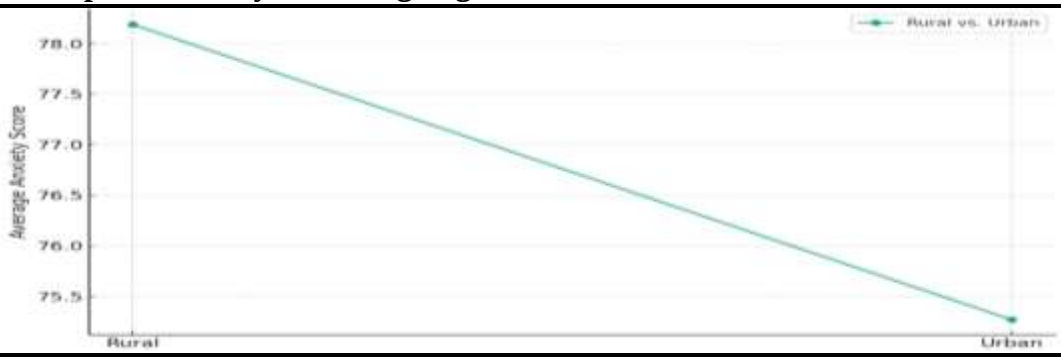
In figure 1, girls (79.02) are more anxious than boys (75.48) in EAL classes. This could be because girls might take their language learning more seriously or be more open about feeling nervous. It is also believed that girls and boys experience distinct stress when learning a new language.
After the analysis of speech anxiety according to gender, statistics were applied to get descriptive values and average speech anxiety scores concerning rural and urban backgrounds. The percentage of the findings are written in table 3 and figure 2.

Table 3: Descriptive analysis according to background

Background	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent
Rural	62	60.2	60.2
Urban	41	39.8	39.8
Total	103	100.0	100.0

Table 3 is based on the students' backgrounds; the majority (60.2%) are from rural areas, while the minority (39.8%) are from urban areas. This suggests a substantial proportion of rural students in the cohort.

Figure 2: Speech anxiety according to gender



Compared to urban students, who scored 75.27, students from rural areas, who scored 78.19, appear more nervous when speaking English. This could be because students in rural areas may not have as much opportunity to converse or listen to English as students in cities. Moreover, in rural areas, students are more likely to find it difficult to adjust or that they may not have had as

much experience in settings like classrooms. In cities, the English language is spoken to them, and they have different exposure in fields of life like shops, TV, and discussions.

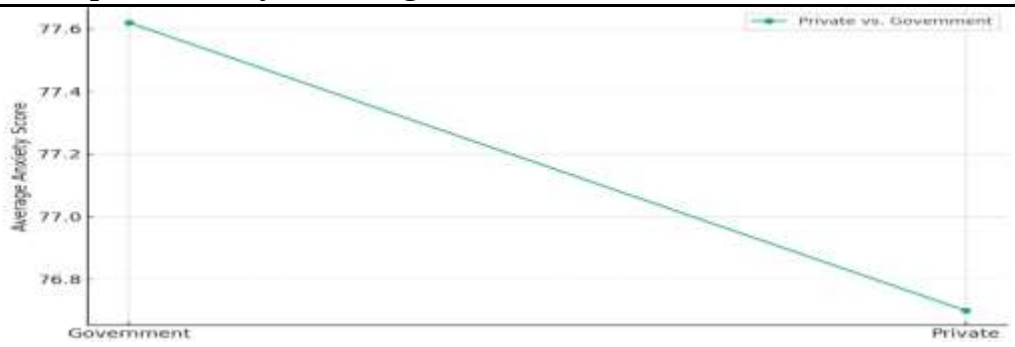
Some students study in private institutes, and some in governmental institutes. To identify the anxiety differences between these two students, statistical analyses were performed to get average anxiety scores concerning students' intermediate education from private institutes or government institutes. Moreover, values are shown in table 4 and figure 3.

Table 4: Descriptive analysis according to the institute

Institute	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent
Government	37	35.9	35.9
Private	66	64.1	64.1
Total	103	100.0	100.0

Classroom speech anxiety is influenced by the type of institute they attend; most students are from private institutes (64.1%), while a smaller portion is from government institutes (35.9%). This suggests that private institutes have a higher student representation in this study.

Figure 3: Speech anxiety according to the institute



There is a slight difference between students from government schools (77.62) and private schools (76.70). Maybe it is because government schools vary greatly in how they teach English. It may be due to a lack of resources compared to private schools. Private schools have smaller classes or more resources for English learning.

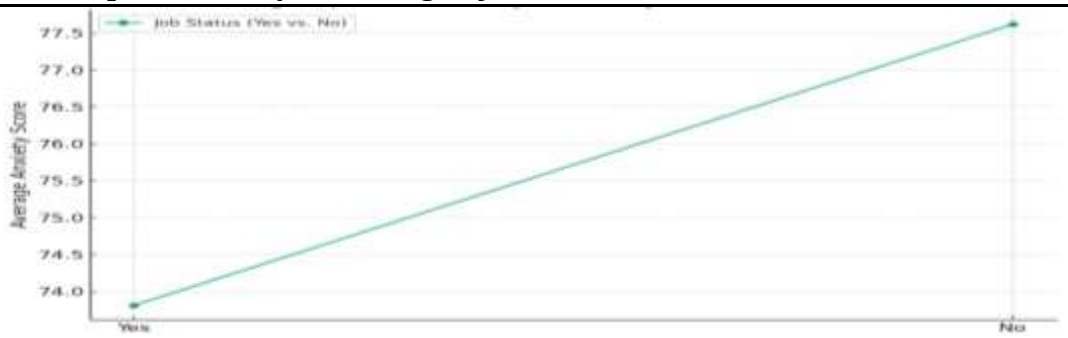
Along with the study, some students do the job. Addressing this query about whether the students of the University of Education are doing any job or not, description statistics are applied, as shown in table 5 below. Then, to assess speech anxiety and its association with their job status, inferential statistics were performed, and the results are shown in figure 4.

Table 5: Descriptive analysis according to the job status

Job	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent
No	87	84.5	84.5
Yes	16	15.5	15.5
Total	103	100.0	100.0

In terms of job status, a large majority of the students, 87 out of 103 or 84.5%, do not have a job, while a smaller group of 16 students are working. This points to the fact that some students focus on professional careers or financially helping their parents.

Figure 4: Speech anxiety according to job status



Interestingly, students who are working have lower anxiety scores (73.81) than those who are not working (77.62). Maybe working allows you to use your English in everyday situations, such as interacting with others or following instructions, which can boost students' confidence in the classroom.

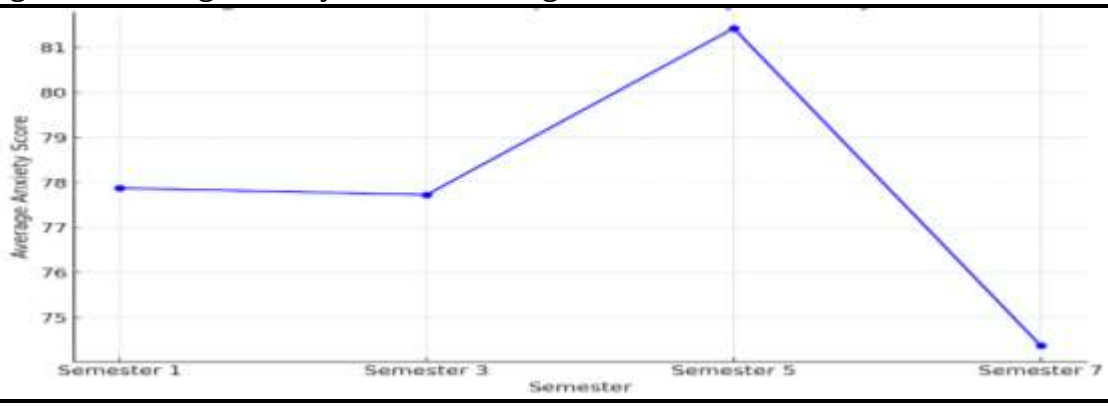
Students of the English department were part of this study. Students' participation in this study and anxiety levels according to their semester are shown in table 6 and figure 5, respectively.

Table 6: Descriptive analysis according to semester

Semester	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent
1.00	24	23.3	23.3
3.00	15	14.6	14.6
5.00	24	23.3	23.3
7.00	40	38.8	38.8
Total	103	100.0	100.0

According to table 6, 23% of students were from 1st semester of the English department, 14% from the 3rd semester, 23.3% from 5th semester, and 38% from the 7th semester of the department. Most of the students were from the 7th semester, and the 3rd semester had the lowest value.

Figure 5: Average anxiety score according to semester



This figure shows the variation in speech anxiety among the students of different semesters. EAL students' attitudes toward speaking English in class fluctuate as their semesters progress. They are initially anxious in semester 1, which is entirely understandable when you are unfamiliar with anything. By semester 3, students start to feel a little more at ease, but by semester 5, there is an unexpected increase in anxiety; perhaps this is because the syllabus is more challenging, or they have to talk more. However, by semester 7, they appeared to have settled in and were less nervous.

Qualitative Analysis

This process involved categorizing the responses into themes or key topics to identify common reasons for anxiety that were not previously described in the survey. Twenty-three responses were collected in response to an open-ended question at the end of the questionnaire. Out of twenty-three, six responses were about language proficiency. It also shows that research allies with objectives. Horwitz's apprehension of verbal communication lies in these reasons. Students were having concerns about speaking English fluently, forgetting common words, lack of vocabulary, and difficulty in expressing thoughts in English, as one of the respondents wrote: "I often forget some words which are very common English words while speaking, I have a good vocabulary, but I can't speak English fluently".

Horwitz's negative evaluation was approved when students wrote: "Judgmental attitude of listeners" and "hard attitude of professors" as reasons for their communication issues. Some students come with unique and interesting reasons for their classroom speech anxiety:

> *I want to speak English regularly, but I have no experience. Let's talk about the presentation strategy in university. They will not prepare the students for presentation. They will not provide the students with proper tips for presentation. But the expectation level of teacher gets very high. A student feels like being imposed by teacher for this task. Which produces anxiety. That's why the students have no interest for presentations and without presentation they don't get fluency in speaking English.*

The above Students' responses confirm Horwitz's theory of evaluation anxiety with concerns about judgmental listeners and professors. Uniquely, some students highlight the link between a desire to speak English and a lack of experience causing anxiety, while others point to unpreparedness due to unclear presentation expectations, both of which contribute to students' overall fear of judgement, lack of confidence, and hesitation when speaking English in class.

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the nuanced relationship between demographic factors and speech anxiety among university students. The descriptive statistics

revealed variations in anxiety levels across different demographic variables, such as gender, background, institute type, job status, and academic semester. For instance, females exhibited higher levels of anxiety compared to males in English as an Additional Language (EAL) classes, and students from rural backgrounds demonstrated higher anxiety scores compared to their urban counterparts. Moreover, variations in anxiety levels were observed across different academic semesters, with students exhibiting fluctuations in anxiety levels as they progressed through their semesters. The qualitative analysis further illuminated the factors contributing to speech anxiety, including language proficiency challenges, fear of judgment, and lack of confidence in presentation skills. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of speech anxiety and emphasize the importance of addressing individual and contextual factors to create a supportive learning environment conducive to effective communication and academic success.

This study statistically identified variations in speech anxiety among ESL learners. However, future research can benefit from a more multifaceted approach. A stronger emphasis on quantitative methods is crucial to establishing a solid foundation for reducing speech anxiety. Qualitative data from students' and teachers' perspectives would provide valuable insights into classroom dynamics that contribute to anxiety. Hence, it is suggested that for future research, qualitative data from teachers and students should be taken in the form of interviews or surveys.

Discussions

This research looked into how anxious students feel when they have to speak English as a second language. It is found that there is nervousness or speech anxiety in students. There were anxiety differences among different variables like gender. Females were having anxiety as compared to males. This finding is similar to Hussain's findings (2020). Hussain (2020) found that gender plays a vital role in the anxiety level. Similarly, in this research, females have more classroom speech anxiety as compared to males. It is assumed that gender issues are one of the major causes of speaking in the classroom.

Through mean anxiety score, it was tested that 1st and 2nd-semester students had almost the same anxiety, and it decreased in 7th semester, similar to the findings of (Anwar, 2023). According to Anwar (2023), students have less anxiety than 1st-semester students, and this research statistically shows that in the final semester, students had less anxiety than their first semester.

The findings of Damayanti and Listyani (2020) about lack of competence and confidence are similar to the findings of this paper. Respondents of this research paper have judgmental anxiety, as found by (Rasool et al., 2023). It was noticed that students from the countryside and governmental colleges feel more anxious than city students and privately educated students in their intermediate. This might be because they are not used to speaking English daily. It is also assumed that the private sector has more teaching facilities than the government sector, which could be the reason for lower anxiety among their students.

It was also found that people who have jobs are less anxious, probably because they get to practice English more often at work. They may have public dealing experience. Jobholder students have more exposure than jobless students, which can be the reason for less anxiety in classroom speaking. So, findings vary according to demographic variables, as found by (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014).

Qualitative responses of this research aligned with the theoretical foundation of this study (Horwitz et al., 1986). Students' responses were connected to test anxiety, verbal communication anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation, described in the introduction section of this research paper.

The findings of this study are invaluable for educators and curriculum designers. By identifying the prevalence and nature of speech anxiety among learners, teachers can develop more effective strategies to reduce anxiety in the classroom. This may include creating a more supportive and encouraging learning environment, incorporating activities that build confidence, and using teaching methods that are empathetic to the anxieties faced by learners. Understanding the roots of speech anxiety can lead to more supportive classroom practices that encourage student participation. By mitigating these anxieties, students may become more willing to engage in speaking activities, leading to improved language proficiency and greater confidence in using the language.

Statistically, it is proven that there are speech anxiety differences among students. For future research, it is suggested that qualitative data be taken and suggestions from both students and teachers be made to remove or minimise classroom speech anxiety in ESL learners.

Conclusion

This study aimed to determine the prevalence and severity of speech anxiety among English language learners (EAL). This information was meant to help English Language Teaching (ELT) practitioners develop techniques to reduce and alleviate students' speech anxiety. The fundamental concept was that reducing or eliminating these fears would considerably improve learners' speaking skills in the target language, improving their entire educational experiences. By identifying different types of speech anxiety, teachers can improve their instructional approaches and nurture higher confidence and skill growth in students' oral language abilities. It is anticipated that the study's findings will provide significant insights into the field of language instruction, particularly in improving EAL students' speaking skills.

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