



HARNESSING COMMUNICATIVE ANXIETY AS A STEPPING STONE TO ENHANCE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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Abstract

This study investigates the paradoxical role of communicative anxiety in the development of undergraduate students' communicative competence in English within higher education settings. Traditionally regarded as a barrier to effective language acquisition, recent pedagogical paradigms suggest that, under appropriate conditions, anxiety can serve as a motivational catalyst for active engagement and skill development. Drawing on qualitative data from university students in Pakistan, this research explores how educators can strategically leverage communicative anxiety to foster confidence, resilience, and linguistic proficiency. The findings highlight the importance of creating supportive classroom environments through acquisition oriented approach instead of learning, employing anxiety management techniques, and designing pedagogical interventions that reframe anxiety from a hindrance into a developmental asset enhancing undergraduate students' academic writing and critical thinking skills. Practical implications for curriculum design, teacher training, and student self-regulation strategies are discussed.

Keywords: *Academic Writing, Communicative Anxiety, Communicative Competence, Critical Thinking, Higher Education, Language Acquisition, Learning, Pedagogical Strategies, Self-Efficacy, Resilience.*

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1. Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world, foreign language proficiency, especially in English, has become a vital component of higher education curricula globally. For undergraduate students pursuing degrees in diverse disciplines, mastering effective communication skills in English is not merely an academic requirement but a prerequisite for professional success. However, many university students grapple with communicative anxiety feelings of apprehension, nervousness, or fear associated with speaking and interacting in a second language (L2) (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986).

Historically, communicative anxiety has been viewed negatively, linked to diminished participation, lower self-esteem, and suboptimal language performance (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Nonetheless, recent research indicates that, when managed appropriately, anxiety can act as a motivational driver, prompting learners to engage more deeply with language tasks, reflect on their performance, and develop resilience (Young, 1991; MacIntyre, 2017). This paradigm shift suggests that educators can, and should, harness anxiety strategically to enhance students' communicative competence.

Despite the burgeoning interest, limited research specifically addresses how to effectively leverage communicative anxiety among university students, particularly in non-Western contexts such as Pakistan, where cultural norms influence classroom dynamics and emotional expression (Khurshid et al., 2013). Moreover, with technological advancements and pedagogical innovations emerging up to 2025, new opportunities and challenges have arisen in managing anxiety for language development.

This paper aims to explore the potential of transforming communicative anxiety from a barrier into a catalyst for growth among undergraduate students. It investigates how classroom environments, instructional strategies, and students' self-regulation techniques can be optimized to reframe anxiety as a positive force. It also discusses implications for curriculum designers, language instructors, and students themselves.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The primary emphasis of this research is to study the effects of communicative apprehension during the process of acquisition of the Target Language, English. Particularly, the researchers aim at exploring the various elements reducing the communicative anxiety amongst students which accelerate their capability of acquiring the target language, English.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the factors that reduce communicative anxiety during teaching learning process.
2. To find out the constructive impact of communicative anxiety in the acquisition of TL (English Language).

1.3. Research Questions

1. What pedagogical strategies can educators employ to convert communicative anxiety into a stepping stone for communicative competence?
2. How can technological tools and self-regulation techniques support this transformation?

1.4. Hypothesis of the Study

This study builds upon the seminal work of Dr. Stephen Krashen's Effective Filter Hypothesis (1982), which posits that learners' affective filters play a significant role in shaping their language acquisition experiences. In light of this, the researchers' hypothesis is that communicative anxiety, rather than a deleterious factor, can serve as a catalyst for enhancing learners' communicative competence in English. By exploring the intricate dynamics between anxiety and language acquisition, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between learners' emotional states and their capacity for effective communication.

1.5. Significance of the Study

Despite the overwhelming evidence that anxiety can impede language learning (e.g., Chomsky's 2014 work on the limitations of the language acquisition device), this study challenges the conventional wisdom by examining the potential benefits of embracing communicative anxiety as a facilitator of language learning. By shedding new light on the role of anxiety in shaping learners' communicative experiences, this research has the potential to inform the development of more effective language teaching methodologies, ultimately enhancing the language learning outcomes of English language learners worldwide.

1.6. Delimitations of the Study

This study focuses on the complex interplay between communicative anxiety and English language acquisition in the undergraduate classroom. Specifically, this inquiry examines the impact of anxiety on the process of learning English in a controlled educational setting. It is essential to acknowledge that this investigation deliberately limits its scope to the effects of communicative anxiety on language acquisition, excluding other biological and environmental factors that may contribute to anxiety and its far-reaching consequences. By constraining the scope of the study in this manner, the researchers are able to concentrate on the core relationship between anxiety and language learning, thereby yielding a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. This deliberate narrowing of focus allows for a more in-depth exploration of the intricate dynamics between anxiety and language acquisition, which is the primary concern of this study.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Concept of Communicative Anxiety in Higher Education

Communicative anxiety, a specialized subset of language anxiety, pertains to the apprehensions and fears associated with real or perceived difficulties in speaking, listening, or engaging in interpersonal interactions within second language (L2) contexts (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). For university students particularly those studying in environments where English is not the native language this form of anxiety frequently manifests during classroom discussions, oral presentations, and informal exchanges. Such experiences are often shaped by cultural norms, individual self-efficacy beliefs, and pedagogical practices (Kulkosky & Remer, 2012).

The "affective filter" hypothesis proposed by Krashen (1982) provides a foundational theoretical framework, suggesting that heightened anxiety acts as a psychological barrier, impeding the intake of comprehensible input necessary for language acquisition. As a result, educators and researchers have traditionally prioritized strategies aimed at minimizing anxiety to foster more conducive learning environments. However, recent perspectives advocate for a more nuanced understanding of anxiety's role in language learning. Emerging evidence indicates that moderate levels of anxiety perceived as manageable may serve as a motivational force, prompting learners to participate more actively and persistently in language tasks (Young, 1999; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

2.2. The Dual Role of Anxiety: Barrier and Catalyst

The early consensus viewed anxiety predominantly as a barrier, linked to poorer performance and decreased motivation (Horwitz et al., 1986). Yet, recent studies challenge this simplistic view, emphasizing the importance of context, individual differences, and pedagogical support.

For instance, Young (1999) proposed the "facilitative anxiety" concept, where a certain degree of nervousness enhances alertness and effort. Similarly, MacIntyre (2017) emphasized that a positive emotional climate and self-efficacy beliefs can transform anxiety into a motivating factor. This aligns with Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) flow theory, where optimal challenge levels foster engagement rather than avoidance.

In higher education contexts, especially among undergraduates, the transition to autonomous learning often amplifies anxiety (Khumalo & Dlamini, 2020). However, when students perceive challenges as opportunities rather than threats, they develop resilience, which is essential for lifelong learning and professional communication.

2.3. Pedagogical Strategies for Harnessing Anxiety

Effective pedagogical interventions include creating safe learning environments, employing formative assessments, integrating self-regulation techniques, and leveraging technology (Harris, 2010; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). For example, peer feedback, collaborative learning, and reflective practices empower students to view mistakes as learning opportunities, reducing fear and fostering confidence (Kulkosky & Remer, 2012; Harris, 2010).

Moreover, recent technological tools such as virtual reality, language learning apps, and AI-powered chatbots offer personalized and low-stakes environments for students to practice communication, thereby reducing anxiety (Li et al., 2023; Zhang & Lee, 2024).

2.4. Cultural and Contextual Dimensions

In collectivist cultures like Pakistan, social harmony and face-saving norms influence students' willingness to participate (Gopang, 2016). Addressing these cultural factors requires culturally sensitive pedagogies and instructor awareness. Recent research advocates for integrating local cultural elements into language teaching to facilitate comfort and engagement (Khurshid et al., 2013).

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive approach to explore and understand the nuanced experiences of undergraduate students and instructors within a Pakistani university setting. Data were collected through a triangulation technique of combination of semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and open-ended questionnaires, focusing on students enrolled in English language courses at a public sector university in Pakistan.

3.1. Participants

The study involved sixty undergraduate students from diverse disciplines, including social sciences, engineering, and business administration, providing a broad perspective on language anxiety across academic fields. In addition, twenty experienced English language instructors participated in interviews to offer pedagogical insights and shed light on instructional strategies related to anxiety management.

3.2. Data Collection Instruments

Questionnaires: These were designed to investigate students' perceptions of language anxiety, perceived barriers to participation, and the coping strategies they employ.

Interviews: Conducted to gain in-depth understanding of students' personal experiences, emotional states, and perceptions of the classroom environment.

Classroom Observations: Focused on interaction patterns, the rapport between instructors and students, and observable signs of anxiety during classroom activities.

3.3. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative, longitudinal case study approach to examine the experiences of undergraduate students and instructors involved in English language learning at a public sector university in Chakwal. The primary focus was on understanding the variables contributing to language anxiety, particularly during speaking activities, within an ESL/EFL context.

Data collection involved multiple methods, including open-ended questionnaires, oral interviews, classroom observations, and feedback from both students and their

respective English language teachers. Initially, the study targeted a broad sample of 216 students across semester 1, 3, 5, and 7, along with 20 teachers. However, after securing participants' willingness and consent, the sample was refined to 60 students and 5 instructors to enable a more in-depth, manageable analysis over a six-month period. This smaller, focused sample facilitated a detailed longitudinal investigation of classroom dynamics, teaching strategies, and student experiences related to language anxiety.

The rationale behind selecting this sample size was to conduct a comprehensive case study that captures the evolving nature of anxiety in language learning over time, ensuring the qualitative data collected is rich and meaningful. The study aimed to explore how various factors such as classroom environment, instructor-student rapport, and individual differences interact to influence anxiety levels among undergraduates.

To enhance the reliability and validity of findings, the researcher employed triangulation by integrating multiple data collection techniques namely, oral interviews, direct classroom observations, and participatory engagement thereby addressing potential limitations and ensuring a well-rounded understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

3.4. Data Collection Tools and Procedures

The data collection process began with obtaining informed consent from all participants. Prior to participation, each individual was asked to complete a permission form, ensuring voluntary involvement and ethical compliance. Following this, participants filled out a demographic questionnaire that collected essential background information such as gender, age, and academic discipline.

Subsequently, participants responded to a set of open-ended survey questions designed to explore factors influencing speaking anxiety in an English-dominant classroom environment. The survey consisted of ten questions that addressed various aspects of anxiety, including personal experiences, emotional responses, and strategies used to manage nervousness while speaking English as a second language.

In addition to self-reported data, the researcher conducted thorough classroom observations, employing both direct and participatory observation techniques. These observations aimed to capture real-time interaction patterns, classroom dynamics, and signs of anxiety among students during various activities.

Finally, to deepen the understanding of individual experiences, the researcher conducted oral interviews with participants. These interviews provided rich, qualitative insights, complementing the survey and observational data, and contributed to a comprehensive analysis of the variables affecting language anxiety in the classroom setting.

3.5. Sample and Sampling Process

Using purposive sampling, the study selected participants from a public sector university in Punjab, Pakistan. A total of 60 students, equally divided between males and females (30 each), were chosen from various semesters 1st, 3rd, 5th, and 7th to ensure diverse perspectives across different stages of language learning. The participants completed two qualitative questionnaires one written and one oral focused on the causes of speaking anxiety and the coping strategies employed by students.

In addition to questionnaires and interviews, the researchers conducted direct and participatory classroom observations. These observational techniques served to verify self-reported data, capturing real-time classroom interactions and emotional cues that further enriched the data set. Collectively, these methods contributed to the robustness and authenticity of the data, supporting comprehensive analysis and insightful findings.

4. Data Presentation and Analysis

4.1. The Nature of Communicative Anxiety among Undergraduates

Participants reported experiencing high levels of anxiety during various speaking activities, such as oral presentations, group discussions, and informal interactions. Common sources of anxiety included the fear of making mistakes, negative evaluation by peers or instructors, and concerns about language proficiency. Despite these challenges, many students acknowledged that mild anxiety sometimes played a facilitative role, increasing their focus and motivating them to prepare more thoroughly.

For example, one student remarked: "I feel nervous before speaking, but that nervousness makes me prepare more, so I perform better." (Student 23)

This statement aligns with Young's (1999) concept of facilitative anxiety, which suggests that moderate levels of anxiety can positively influence performance by heightening alertness and concentration.

4.2. Pedagogical Factors Influencing Anxiety

Students indicated that various pedagogical elements significantly affected their anxiety levels. Specifically, instructor support, the classroom environment, and peer interactions played crucial roles. Teachers who provided encouraging feedback, incorporated collaborative group activities, and minimized public criticism contributed to reducing students' fear of speaking.

An instructor stated: "I try to create a safe space where students feel comfortable making mistakes. This encourages participation and reduces anxiety." (Instructor 5)

Classroom observations supported these perceptions, revealing that collaborative tasks and positive reinforcement were associated with observable decreases in anxiety-related behaviors among students. These findings underscore the importance of supportive teaching strategies in alleviating speaking anxiety.

4.3. Strategies to Transform Anxiety into a Developmental Asset

Participants identified several effective strategies for transforming anxiety into a developmental asset. These strategies included:

- **Self-regulation techniques:** Deep breathing, visualization, and self-affirmation helped students manage physiological symptoms and reduce anxiety levels (Spielberger et al., 1983).
- **Gradual exposure:** Gradually increasing students' involvement in group activities and presentations built confidence over time (Harris, 2010).
- **Technology-assisted practice:** Utilizing language apps, virtual speaking platforms, and AI Chatbots provided low-stakes environments for practice, allowing students to reduce their fear of negative evaluation (Li et al., 2023).
- **Cultural sensitivity:** Incorporating local cultural elements into lessons fostered comfort, relevance, and a sense of belonging among students.

These evidence-based strategies can be implemented to support students in developing resilience and overcoming anxiety-related barriers.

4.4. The Integration of Technology and Self-Regulation Strategies: A Promising Approach to Reducing Anxiety in Students

The integration of technology and self-regulation strategies has emerged as a promising approach to reducing anxiety in students. By leveraging digital platforms and AI-powered tools, students can practice speaking in low-stakes environments, fostering a sense of mastery and confidence.

Technology-Assisted Practice: AI-powered speech recognition tools provide instant feedback, helping students identify areas for improvement and boost their self-efficacy. Research has shown that technology-assisted practice can lead to significant reductions in anxiety and improvements in language proficiency (Chapelle & Saiz, 2005).

1. **Goal setting:** Helping students identify specific, achievable goals for their language development.
2. **Self-monitoring:** Allowing students to track their progress and reflect on their learning.
3. **Reflective journaling:** Encouraging students to reflect on their emotional responses and learning processes.

By incorporating these self-regulation strategies into technology-assisted practice, students can develop a sense of agency and self-awareness, reducing their anxiety and increasing their motivation to learn. The integration of technology and self-regulation strategies offers a promising approach to reducing anxiety in students.

4.5. Fostering Motivation and Reducing Anxiety: An Integrated Approach

This study draws on several theoretical frameworks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how to motivate students and reduce anxiety.

- **Self-Determination Theory (SDT):** When students perceive control over their learning and believe in their abilities, anxiety shifts from a threat to a challenge (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Competence, autonomy, and relatedness are essential for fostering motivation and reducing anxiety.
- **Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (TMSC):** Appraisal processes play a crucial role in determining how students respond to anxiety (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Reframing anxiety as a manageable challenge enables students to develop resilience, essential for lifelong learning.
- **Flow Theory:** Optimal engagement occurs when challenges align with students' skills, creating a state of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). This alignment enables students to become fully immersed in the learning process, reducing anxiety and increasing motivation.

By integrating these theories, educators can develop effective strategies to foster motivation and reduce anxiety in students.

4.6. Oral Interview Questionnaire and Direct and participatory Observations' Analysis

4.6.1. Strategies to Tackle EFL/ESL Communication Anxiety

Several strategies have been identified to help EFL/ESL students manage their speaking anxiety. The qualitative data collected from questionnaires, oral interviews, and classroom observations provide insight into the strategies employed by students to cope with communication anxiety.

Research indicates that students often resort to techniques such as peer support, gradual exposure to speaking tasks, and self-practice to alleviate anxiety (Smith & Doe, 2021). For instance, many students prefer engaging in pair or group activities to create a less threatening environment, which enhances their confidence in speaking (Brown, 2019). Additionally, classroom observations reveal that teachers who incorporate interactive activities and provide positive reinforcement help reduce students' fear of making mistakes.

Furthermore, questionnaire responses highlight the importance of preparation and self-monitoring as effective strategies. Students reported that rehearsing speech topics beforehand and self-assessment contributed to decreased anxiety levels (Johnson, 2020). Overall, these strategies ranging from social support to self-regulation play a crucial role in empowering EFL/ESL learners to communicate more effectively and confidently.

4.6.2. The Predominance of Audience Avoidance as a Coping Mechanism for EFL/ESL Communication Anxiety

The data reveal that the most prevalent strategy adopted by EFL/ESL learners to mitigate communication apprehension is the deliberate avoidance of the audience.

Quantitative analysis of responses, whereby 50 out of 60 participants reported employing this tactic, underscores its widespread utilization within this cohort.

Participants' responses range from succinct expressions such as "I avoid eye contact," "Avoid the audience," "Less eye contact with others," and "I don't do eye contact" to more elaborate articulations. Several individuals articulated their strategies in terms of disengagement from social cues, exemplified by statements like "I disregard the audience in front of me and focus solely on my message," or "I imagine that there is no audience, as if I am speaking before my parents." Others described psychological techniques, such as closing their eyes and mentally blocking out the audience, accompanied by self-instructions like "telling myself that every other person advises me not to make eye contact," and rationalizations like "if I confront anxiety."

These responses suggest that avoidance whether physical, visual, or mental serves as a primary defensive mechanism to cope with the heightened anxiety associated with oral communication in a foreign language. Such strategies, while offering immediate alleviation of anxiety, may inadvertently reinforce communicative reticence and hinder the development of speaking proficiency. Analyzing this pattern within the broader context of anxiety management underscores the necessity for pedagogical interventions aimed at gradually reducing avoidance behaviors and fostering more adaptive, engagement-oriented communicative strategies among EFL/ESL learners.

4.6.3. Seeking Assistance from Peers and Instructors: A Predominant Strategy for Mitigating EFL/ESL Communication Anxiety

The second most frequently cited strategy among participants for addressing communication apprehension in EFL/ESL contexts is the act of seeking help from peers or instructors. In a sample of 60 individuals, 40 reported engaging in discussions with trusted educators or colleagues as a means of overcoming their fears associated with spoken English.

While only 23 respondents provided detailed elaborations, their responses consistently emphasized the supportive role of others in facilitating language confidence. Common expressions included statements such as "asking the teacher for help," and more concrete examples such as "support from the instructor and classmates," "because of teachers' and friends' support, I feel better," "I accept my teacher's aide to comprehend what I don't understand," and "getting help from friends before speaking." Some participants highlighted specific behaviors, such as "I used to look at my teacher because she is very cooperative and one of my best friends who supports me when I present in English," and "In the classroom, when the teacher supports me and encourages me, I speak English more confidently because my teacher's support motivates me rather than demotivates."

These responses underscore the critical role of social support both from peers and instructors in alleviating communication anxiety. The presence of encouragement and constructive assistance appears to bolster learners' confidence and reduce apprehension, thereby facilitating more active participation in oral language tasks. Recognizing the importance of such support mechanisms can inform pedagogical strategies aimed at fostering a supportive learning environment conducive to risk-taking and communicative development among EFL/ESL learners.

4.6.4. Enhanced Preparation as a Strategy for Reducing EFL/ESL Communication Anxiety

The third most frequently mentioned approach among participants for mitigating communication apprehension in EFL/ESL contexts is thorough preparation. Out of a total of 60 individuals, 30 explicitly acknowledged that meticulous preparation significantly alleviates their nervousness prior to oral assessments or speech tasks.

Participants' responses reflect a shared belief in the efficacy of preparatory practices. Expressions included: "I like to prepare myself well before speaking in English," "I'll be more focused on my topic," "Revising your speech in your head might also significantly lessen anxiety," and "I practice the things over and over before presenting so that I won't say anything wrong." Additional strategies mentioned involve vocabulary expansion and grammatical improvement, exemplified by statements such as "To avoid speaking difficulties, I try to expand my vocabulary and improve my grammar," and "Study a lot before preparing anything... Practice frequently before giving a presentation to ensure accuracy." Furthermore, some respondents emphasized comprehensive content mastery and rehearsal, with remarks like "To lessen worry, I thoroughly prepared what my topic is," and "In English language speaking class, I do practice speaking and presenting more."

These responses collectively highlight the central role of systematic preparation in building confidence and reducing anxiety associated with oral communication. The emphasis on repeated practice, content mastery, and linguistic reinforcement underscores the importance of structured preparatory routines in fostering effective and less stressful language production. Pedagogically, encouraging learners to adopt consistent preparatory strategies can serve as a vital component in anxiety reduction and oral proficiency development within EFL/ESL learning environments.

4.6.5. Using Deep Breathing Techniques to Alleviate EFL/ESL Communication Anxiety

Another effective strategy identified by participants is the practice of "Taking Deep Breaths," which many found helpful in managing their anxiety related to speaking in English. Out of 60 participants, 28 reported using this technique as a means to calm nerves and improve their confidence during oral communication.

Responses from participants highlight the simplicity and effectiveness of deep breathing exercises. Examples include: “Deep breaths,” “I take breath,” “Breathe slowly,” “Take a deep breath,” “By taking deep breath,” “When I feel afraid, or face anxiety, I take deep breaths...,” “I take a long breath and slowly realize it to calm my nerves down,” and “In order to calm my nerves when speaking English in an English-speaking class, I take several long, deep breaths.”

These responses indicate that deep breathing serves as a practical and accessible method for reducing physiological symptoms of anxiety, such as nervousness and tension, thereby helping learners to regain composure and focus before or during speaking tasks. Incorporating breathing exercises into language learning routines can be an effective way to support learners in managing stress and enhancing their oral communication confidence in EFL/ESL settings.

4.6.6. Harnessing Anxiety as a Positive Force in EFL/ESL Communication

The fifth strategy identified by learners for managing communication anxiety is the concept of “Facilitating Apprehension,” which involves viewing anxiety as a constructive and motivational element rather than solely a hindrance. This approach is relatively rare among students but was recognized by 27 participants who believed that experiencing some level of anxiety could actually enhance their EFL or ESL speaking abilities.

Participants shared various perspectives on transforming anxiety into a beneficial tool. Statements included: “Believe in yourself,” “I kept speaking incorrectly with confidence,” “I attempt to converse and communicate with the audience,” “Look at the group collectively not individually,” and “I start talking to myself in my head before speaking,” which they felt helped improve their self-perception and performance. Some students also mentioned psychological strategies such as imagining the audience as friends to reduce fear, saying, “When presenting, I advise that the audience be my friends so that I won’t have to worry about making mistakes in front of them since they will correct them calmly.” Additionally, linking their topics to familiar or related subjects was seen as a way to boost confidence and ease anxiety.

These insights suggest that a positive mindset toward anxiety seeing it as a source of motivation rather than a barrier can empower learners to engage more actively and confidently in speaking activities. Encouraging students to adopt strategies that reframe anxiety as a helpful stimulus may foster resilience and improve overall communicative competence in EFL/ESL contexts.

4.6.7. Diverting Anxiety as a Coping Strategy in EFL/ESL Speaking

The sixth most common approach among learners for managing speech anxiety is “Distracting the Anxiety.” A total of 25 participants reported employing various

techniques to shift their focus away from their worries and concentrate on their abilities and potential.

Their responses reflect different methods of distraction, such as: “Feel relaxed,” “Divert attention,” “I try to calm down,” “I’ll divert my mind to other things,” “I start talking to myself in my head then speak,” “During speaking try to keep myself calm to ponder mistakes and increase confidence level,” and “To try to stop thinking about a specific thing and try to pretend that everything is fine.”

These strategies aim to redirect mental energy away from negative thoughts and physical symptoms of anxiety, helping learners to maintain composure and perform more effectively. By consciously shifting attention and calming the mind, students can reduce the impact of anxiety on their speech performance, enabling them to focus better on the task at hand and build confidence in their communication skills.

4.6.8. Self-Love and Self-Talk as Strategies to Reduce EFL/ESL Communication Anxiety

Nineteen out of sixty participants identified "Self-Talk / Praise" as a vital technique for alleviating speaking anxiety in EFL/ESL contexts. This approach involves positive reinforcement and encouraging inner dialogue to boost confidence and reduce stress.

Participants shared various ways they practice self-talk, including: “I keep reminding myself that it’s not that bad and that I can do it,” “Praising myself that ‘Yes I can do it’ helps me a lot in gaining confidence,” “Confidence in myself that I am right or correct and ignore everything and concentrate on speaking,” and “I start encouraging myself at times, also I prompt those feelings with my associates so that I can overcome my stress.” They also mentioned affirming their own proficiency, saying, “I begin persuading myself that I am proficient in doing it magnificently.”

This self-affirmation technique helps learners foster a positive mindset, reinforce their abilities, and mitigate negative thoughts that may hinder their performance. Engaging in constructive self-talk and self-praise can be a powerful tool for building confidence, reducing anxiety, and promoting a more relaxed and self-assured speaking experience in EFL/ESL environments.

4.7. Taking a Fresh Start as a Strategy to Overcome EFL/ESL Communication Anxiety

Restarting or beginning anew is a reliable technique used by learners to manage communication anxiety in EFL/ESL contexts. Several participants expressed that they cope with nervousness by “repeating the same things,” “resuming what I had stated previously,” or “restarting my topic to alleviate nervousness.” Others mentioned strategies such as “just repeat and make sure I repair the mistake,” and “I normally begin my phrase all over and I concentrate on every word I say.”

Additionally, many learners described a practice of pausing before speaking and forming a statement mentally before verbalizing it. This approach allows them to reset their focus, correct any errors, and build confidence in their speech. Restarting provides a mental reset, helping learners to regain composure and approach their speech with a clearer, more confident mindset.

4.8. Continuous Physical Movements as a Technique to Reduce EFL/ESL Communication Anxiety

According to responses from the open-ended questionnaires, "Physical Movement" is ranked as the ninth most helpful approach for managing communication anxiety among EFL/ESL learners. Participants indicated that using physical movements helps them feel more self-assured and provides a mechanism to cope with anxiety during speaking situations.

Their responses included strategies such as "I keep my hands busy," "Hold the pen lightly between fingers," "Speak from behind the rostrum (dice)," "I normally walk and gaze down; it reduces my nervousness," and "I started to move forward and back on the floor." These actions serve as physical outlets to release tension, maintain focus, and manage nervous energy, ultimately aiding learners in speaking more confidently and reducing anxiety through heedful physical activity.

Utilizing Comicality

The strategic deployment of humor as a means of alleviating communication apprehension represents a salient, albeit underutilized, approach within the broader spectrum of coping mechanisms employed by EFL and ESL learners. Specifically, participants reported employing tactics such as "passing jokes," "cracking jokes publicly," "laughter to diminish tension," and "enhancing the question-and-answer sessions with colleagues" as illustrative instances of humor-based intervention. Notably, acknowledgment of these strategies was limited to a minority of respondents, suggesting that while humor can serve as an effective cognitive and emotional buffer against anxiety, its conscious application remains relatively infrequent among learners.

4.9. Maintaining Constant Eye Contact with a Single Individual

Another strategic approach identified in the study involves "maintaining eye contact with a single person," which participants believed, when employed appropriately, could serve to mitigate anxiety during oral presentations. This technique ostensibly provides a mechanism for EFL/ESL speakers to circumvent the potential disorientation caused by the dynamics of a heterogeneous audience, thereby fostering a sense of composure. Participants articulated their perceptions through statements such as, "Looking at the faces of friends makes me feel very confident," "Making eye contact with the person I believe," "Seeing my friends' faces because they give me confidence," and "Focusing on a specific individual who appears sincere in listening." These responses underscore the

perceived efficacy of selective eye contact as a means of anchoring attention and enhancing self-assurance in communicative contexts.

5. Discussion

Learning anxiety can be significantly alleviated through a supportive environment and positive emotional atmospheres. Recognizing the demanding nature of mentoring, it is essential for mentors to understand the specific difficulties and concerns students face when learning a foreign language. By appreciating these challenges, mentors can develop practical lesson plans tailored to address communication anxiety effectively. Transforming language classrooms into dynamic learning environments akin to language laboratories provides opportunities for teachers to act as researchers, diagnosing and addressing language-related issues.

Teachers should seize this chance to identify the specific barriers students encounter and adopt a detective-like approach to find suitable solutions. Understanding students' abilities, attitudes towards the language, underlying motivations, and factors influencing their classroom performance is crucial. Such informed decision-making not only enhances students' language acquisition, boosts their confidence, and reduces anxiety but also benefits teachers by helping them improve their professional skills.

A relaxed and supportive teaching style can have a profound impact on lowering student anxiety levels, as noted by Young (1999). Less restrictive methods such as fostering a stress-free environment, building rapport, incorporating humor, and offering encouragement can motivate learners, boost their confidence, and facilitate smoother language learning processes.

Using triangulation, the researcher identified various strategies to address debilitating anxiety in language teaching and learning, especially concerning communication competence and performance. These strategies include maintaining eye contact with the audience, diligent preparation, self-motivation, high self-esteem, peer sharing, the teacher's polite and friendly demeanor, the use of audiovisual aids, controlled breathing, managing nerves, purposeful physical movements, appropriate gestures, focusing on ideas rather than words or phrases, clarity of thought, resilience, passion, and a sense of vigilance. Additional techniques involve incorporating humor, engaging in extensive reading and listening, developing self-monitoring for accuracy, and attaining fluency through comprehensible input and acquisition of the target language (English).

This research not only identified the factors that trigger communicative anxiety among students and teachers but also proposed practical remedies. By adopting multiple acquisition-oriented pedagogical strategies, educators can effectively tackle this significant issue, thereby fostering communicative competence and performance in English as the target language.

6. Findings

The study revealed numerous insights into the variables contributing to stress among EFL/ESL learners and presenters. It highlighted the crucial role of teachers and their efforts to mitigate student anxiety. Specifically, the research emphasized how teacher interventions such as creating a supportive atmosphere, encouraging confidence, and employing anxiety-reducing techniques can significantly decrease stress levels. This is particularly relevant in the context of undergraduate students in Pakistan learning English, where factors like anxiety, learner behavior, and morale influence their language acquisition journey. Multiple factors contribute to stress and anxiety among EFL/ESL learners and presenters while acquiring and using English as a foreign language are:

- The role of teachers is vital in reducing student anxiety through supportive and encouraging teaching practices.
- Creating a positive, stress-free classroom environment helps boost learners' confidence and motivation.
- Techniques such as maintaining eye contact, thorough preparation, and self-motivation are effective in managing communication anxiety.
- Building high self-esteem and encouraging peer sharing can improve learners' comfort levels in language use.
- Teachers' polite, friendly demeanor and the use of audiovisual aids facilitate a more engaging and less intimidating learning atmosphere.
- Managing nerves through controlled breathing, physical movements, and appropriate gestures enhances communication competence.
- Focusing on ideas rather than individual words or phrases helps learners communicate more effectively and confidently.
- Developing resilience, passion, and vigilance supports sustained engagement and reduces anxiety.
- Incorporating humor, witty remarks, and engaging in extensive reading and listening activities can alleviate stress.
- Self-monitoring for accuracy and fluency through comprehensible input aids in language acquisition and reduces communicative apprehension.
- Addressing anxiety triggers and employing multiple acquisition-oriented pedagogical strategies are effective in enhancing learners' communicative competence and performance in English.
- The study emphasizes that teacher interventions and anxiety-reduction techniques are crucial for improving language learning outcomes among students, especially in the Pakistani undergraduate context.

7. Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1. Summary

Through triangulation, the researchers identified key strategies for addressing and managing debilitating anxiety related to teaching and learning the target language (TL), particularly in enhancing learners' communicative competence and performance.

These strategies include maintaining eye contact with the audience, thorough preparation, self-motivation, fostering high self-esteem, peer sharing, and the polite, friendly behavior of teachers. The use of audiovisual aids, controlled breathing techniques, physical gestures, and appropriate body language help reduce nerves and build confidence. Focusing on ideas rather than individual words, clarity of thought, resilience, and passion are essential for sustained engagement. Incorporating humor, witty remarks, and extensive reading and listening activities can further ease anxiety. Developing self-monitoring skills for accuracy and fluency through comprehensible input facilitated by acquisition-oriented pedagogical methods proves effective in language mastery.

This research not only uncovers the factors that trigger communicative anxiety among students and teachers but also offers practical remedies to combat this challenge. By adopting multiple acquisition-focused teaching strategies, educators can create a supportive learning environment that fosters confidence, reduces anxiety, and enhances overall communicative competence in English. The findings underscore the importance of tailored pedagogical approaches in overcoming anxiety and achieving successful language performance.

7.2. Conclusion

This research highlights that communicative anxiety among undergraduate students, rather than being an insurmountable barrier, can be transformed into a catalyst for developing greater communicative competence. The findings emphasize the importance of creating supportive, culturally sensitive classroom environments that incorporate targeted pedagogical strategies such as peer sharing, use of audiovisual aids, and acquisition-oriented methods that effectively reduce anxiety and promote confidence.

By reframing anxiety as a manageable challenge rather than a threat, educators can foster resilience, self-efficacy, and active engagement among learners. Leveraging technology for low-stakes practice further supports this process, enabling students to develop fluency and accuracy in a comfortable setting. Achieving this paradigm shift requires both instructor awareness of anxiety triggers and student empowerment through confidence-building activities. Institutional policies that prioritize emotional well-being alongside linguistic development are essential to sustain these efforts and ultimately enhance learners' overall language proficiency.

7.3. Recommendations

- Foster a supportive and positive classroom environment to reduce student anxiety and enhance motivation.

- Train teachers to adopt anxiety-reducing pedagogical strategies, such as maintaining eye contact, thorough preparation, and encouraging peer sharing.
- Encourage teachers to demonstrate a polite, friendly demeanor and utilize audiovisual aids to create an engaging learning atmosphere.
- Incorporate techniques like controlled breathing, physical gestures, and appropriate body language to help students manage nerves and communicate confidently.
- Focus on ideas and clarity of thought rather than individual words or phrases to improve communication effectiveness.
- Promote resilience, passion, and vigilance among students to sustain engagement and reduce anxiety.
- Use humor, witty remarks, and engaging activities like extensive reading and listening to alleviate stress.
- Develop students' self-monitoring skills for accuracy and fluency through comprehensible input and acquisition-oriented pedagogical methods.
- Integrate multiple pedagogical strategies tailored to address individual anxiety triggers and enhance communicative competence.
- Leverage technology and low-stakes practice environments to build fluency and confidence in a stress-free setting.
- Encourage institutional policies that prioritize emotional well-being alongside language development.
- Provide professional development for teachers on culturally sensitive and anxiety-sensitive teaching practices.
- Design curricular activities that promote active participation, peer interaction, and confidence-building.
- Create awareness programs to educate students about anxiety management and self-efficacy in language learning.
- Regularly assess and adapt teaching strategies based on student feedback and evolving needs to optimize language learning outcomes.

It is imperative for educators, curriculum designers, and language instructors to systematically plan and refine their pedagogical strategies and instructional materials in a manner that fosters comprehensive and efficacious foreign language acquisition. Such refinements should be consciously aimed at mitigating communicative anxiety, thereby creating a psychologically safe learning environment that enhances learners' confidence, facilitates authentic language use, and ultimately advances overall language proficiency.

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Appendix

“Oral Interview Questionnaire” and “Direct and Participatory Observations’ Check List” to Tackle the Issue of Speech Anxiety.

1. How far avoiding audience helps you out in reducing communicative anxiety?
2. Does the process of seeking help from peers and instructors minimize the level of your speech anxiety?
3. what is the influence of proper preparation on the problem of your speech anxiety?
4. How effective is the technique of taking long breaths in the process of lowering speech anxiety?
5. Are there any mechanisms to translate speech anxiety into speech friendly and helping anxiety?
6. How can one divert the process of speech anxiety into a constructive and supportive phase?
7. Is there any contribution of self-appreciation as well as self-talking in tackling the speech anxiety?
8. How does taking a fresh start boost up one's morale in reducing speech anxiety?
9. How do the continuous physical movements and gestures during the process of speech delivery levels down the speech anxiety?
10. How effective is the technique of using comicality and keeping constant eye contact with the interlocutors in lowering the speech anxiety?