

RESEARCH ARTICLE

English-Speaking Anxiety and Its Influencing Factors Among Students in Gomal University, Dera Ismail Khan

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Abstract: The aim of the study was to highlight the main factors contributing to speaking anxiety among undergraduate students at Gomal University, Dera Ismail Khan, located in KP, Pakistan. An interpretive mixed-method approach was used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. A total of 100 students completed the questionnaire, while 10 students participated in semi-structured interviews. Through analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data, we identified numerous sources of speaking anxiety: grammar mistakes, lack of speaking practice, presentation, lack of confidence and problems with making a proper sentence structure during their conversation with non-natives. Moreover, the qualitative analysis suggested some additional contributing factors, including fear of fellow's criticism and audience expectations. The findings of this study hold both theoretical and academic significance and deliver valuable suggestions for future research in the field.

Keywords: Second Language Speaking Anxiety, Anxiety, KP, Factors Causing Speaking Anxiety

Introduction

Most of the Pakistani students face significant challenges in learning English speaking skills as a foreign language (Ali, 2020). In comparison to reading, writing and listening, speaking is considered one of the main aspects to induce anxiety among students (Arnold, 1999). In other countries, research on foreign language anxiety began many years ago (Can Y, 2024). Pakistani students mostly prefer to talk in their native language, which is why they have limited opportunities to practice English speaking (Ali, 2020), and these factors heightened students' anxiety in public to speak in English (Kouraogo, 1993). Anxiety is an emotional state that reflects a person's feeling of unease. It is experienced by nervousness and uncertainty, which is sensitised by the autonomic nervous system activation (Spielberger, 1972). Speaking is one of the foremost English language skills, which helps in better understanding and interaction between the speaker and the listener. Communication in English is essential for English learning students to better express their ideas, thoughts and feelings (Nasriandi, 2021). Clarity in spoken language is necessary so that the other person can easily understand your ideas (Munther, 2016). Language proficiency helps in meaningful communication, and a person can easily achieve their goals through better interaction with others (H. Douglas, 2007). Some of the factors which contribute to English speaking anxiety are insufficient vocabulary, grammatical mistakes and fear of speaking English in a proper way (Septy Indrianty, 2016; Turrahmah, 2023; Eda, 2015).

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Linguistic complications like weak grammar, inaccurate pronunciation, limited vocabulary, insufficient exposure to the language, and inadequate verbal skills are the main causes of anxiety (Ganschow, 1996; Antoro, 2015). Studies highlighted that students' English-speaking anxiety increases while presenting in a classroom (Dewi, 2019; Mansoore, 2024). Maria Eva, in her study "An Analysis of Students' Speaking Anxiety in Academic Speaking Class," mentioned that students' English speaking anxiety mainly started from negative evaluation, less confidence and fear of making grammatical mistakes in their communication (Maria, 2020). Moreover, for proper communication with language proficiency, some non-linguistic features are also necessary, like body language, gestures and facial expression, to properly convey the meaning of someone's spoken words (Richard, 2002). Speaking a foreign anxiety is accompanied by some physical symptoms like a fast heartbeat and sweating. It also comprises uncertainty and self-doubt to cope with the situation (Samah, 2016). While speaking, a speaker must consider both the audience and other elements of the speech, like grammar, comprehension, pronunciation, and vocabulary fluency (Alfi, 2014).

Problem Statement

As discussed earlier, anxiety has a great impact on students' English speaking performance. In our study, we aim to explore the main causes of speaking anxiety that students were experiencing, and to identify strategies to enhance the students' confidence and competence.

This research is expected to help students better understand themselves and become more motivated to practice speaking English, enhancing their skills. For lecturers, it provides insights into students' speaking anxiety, enabling more effective and creative teaching. Additionally, it can serve as a reference for future researchers studying speaking anxiety in English.

Research Question

What are the main causes which contribute to speaking anxiety among undergraduate students at Gomal University, as perceived by the students themselves?

Research Methodology

A cross-sectional study was conducted to achieve the objectives of the study by using a mixed-method approach, which helped to combine both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. Qualitative and quantitative methods are the two research approaches mainly used to study the Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) among students (ČeponČepon, 2016).

Population and Sampling

The study was conducted in Gomal University, Dera Ismail Khan. A total of 100 participants, both male and female students, aged between 19 and 23 years, were selected from the same Main Campus, so our results hold broader relevance and significance within the KP province. All of the 100 questionnaires were finalised for the quantitative analysis. In our study, we selected the participants randomly to collect reliable data for the enhancement of the validity of our findings. Moreover, for qualitative data, we selected a total of 10 students who not only completed the questionnaire part but also participated in semi-structured interviews.

Data Collection

During the study time period, quantitative data were collected by developing a questionnaire entitled "Factors Contributing to Second Language Speaking Anxiety among the Gomal University Students" to highlight the main factors which contribute to second language speaking anxiety among the students of the university. The mentioned questionnaire was designed according to the previously used questionnaire proposed by a renowned research scholar for the second language speaking anxiety (Horwitz, 1986; Mansoore, 2024; Dewi,

2019). In the qualitative part of the study, we conducted semi-structured interviews and transcribed them with great care to ensure the objectivity of the study.

Data Analysis

In the following phase, we analyse both quantitative and qualitative data. For quantitative data we used SPSS (Version 2.0) to calculate the percentages and frequency for the identification of the main causes of English language speaking anxiety among the participants. Recorded interviews of the participants were carefully transcribed and reviewed by subject specialist to ensure the accuracy. Later on thematic analysis was done to understand the deepen insights of the students responses.

Results and Discussion

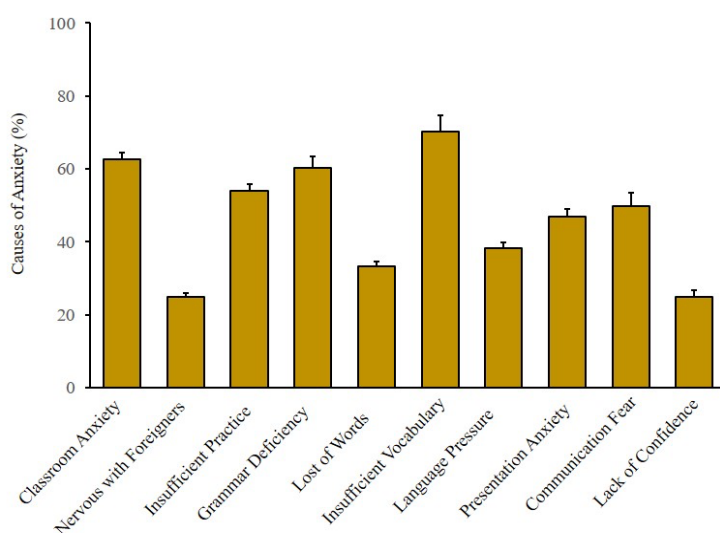
During the study time period data were collected through the questionnaire entitled “Factors Contributing to Second Language Speaking Anxiety among the Gomal University Students”. In the following table participants’ responses to the questions in questionnaire are mentioned.

Table 1

Students Views about Factors Effecting Speaking Anxiety

No	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Un-Certain	Disagree	Strongly Agree
1	When I speak in a classroom I worry about students negative remarks	16.7%	45.8%	11.8%	17.9%	7.8%
2	I’m afraid of speaking English with foreigners	4.1%	20.9%	15.4%	41.2%	18.4%
3	I feel anxious because I have lack of sufficient English speaking practice	14.3%	39.7%	15.8%	25.4%	4.8%
4	I also feel anxious because I don’t have a good command of English grammar	13.8%	46.4%	12.3%	20.9%	6.6%
5	I feel upset, because I don’t know which word is proper to use in a sentence to speak in a class or outside	9.5%	23.7%	19.8%	31.4%	15.6%
6	I always made mistakes in sentence structures because of insufficient vocabulary	18.4%	51.7%	15.7%	11.3%	2.9%
7	I feel myself under pressure and upset to speak perfectly	9.7%	28.6%	24.3%	29.2%	8.2%
8	I feel anxious, when I need to give a presentation in English	10.1%	36.9%	13.4%	26.4%	13.2%
9	I feel worried when I need to explain something to a foreigner in English	11%	38.8%	24.7%	23.9%	1.6%
10	I have low confidence in English speaking.	6.5%	18.3%	14.4%	45.4%	15.4%

Figure 1



Fear of Negative Comments

The study suggested that most of the students feel anxiety and upset due to the apparent susceptibility to negative remarks by their fellows in the classroom. However this fear factor is not only limited to fellow's critical feedback but also negative criticism from others in the department. In Figure 62.5% of the participant either agreed or strongly agreed with the question 1 "When I speak in a classroom I worry about student's negative remarks". These findings were further supported by qualitative data collected by semi-structured interviews of the students. Tariq kamal one of the student he expressed his feeling of fear about negative comments like: "When you try to speak in English, and you are snubbed by fellows, then you feel fear to talk again, although fellows must be facilitator and encouraging".

Fear of Speaking English with Foreigners

According to the collected quantitative data 25% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with questions 2 of the questionnaire: "I'm afraid of speaking English with foreigners" Though most of participants did not agree with this statement, the qualitative data collected through interviews helped to support the evidence. Many students stated feeling anxious during speaking with foreigners in English. Mansoor khan, one of the participants, explained that speaking in English with foreigners as a main source of anxiety, he states that: "Personally, I feel anxious when I need to speak in English with foreigners"

Insufficient English Speaking Practice

According to the participants responses 54% of the students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I feel anxious because I have lack of sufficient English speaking practice" This finding depicts insufficient speaking practice play main role in ESL speaking anxiety among the students. While discussing with a student Eshal, she said:

"The main reason for students fear while speaking English is that they do not engage themselves in sufficient speaking practice. The more you will speak, more you will be confident".

Eshal highlights in her discussion that a lack of regular speaking practice may increase to anxiety levels among ESL beginners.

Problem with English Grammar

The participants' responses show that 60.2 % agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 4: "I also feel anxious because I don't have a good command of English grammar" This finding proposes that most of participants notice themselves as having less knowledge of English grammar, that contributes significantly to their speaking anxiety.

One of the Participant Washma Noor expressed that:

"Our reading, listening and specially grammar learning techniques never developed up to the required standard. This is the reason, I feel anxious to make mistakes in grammar while speaking"

Washma response highlights that having insufficient knowledge of English grammar increases their anxiety toward English grammar mistakes during speaking tasks.

Lost for words while speaking

This study shows that some of the participants feels depressed, when they do not find proper English words during their conversation. Among the participants 33.2% agree or strongly agree with the statement "I feel upset, because I don't know which word is proper to use in a sentence to speak in a class or outside". In this regard Mahbeer Khan a participant expressed his feelings that:

"I often hesitate to recall suitable words while speaking in English"

Insufficient English Vocabulary

Among all the statements of the questionnaire, main anxiety provoking factor was insufficient English vocabulary. About 70.1 % of the participants agree and strongly agree with the question "I always made mistakes in sentence structures because of insufficient vocabulary". This data suggest that having lack of sufficient English vocabulary may significantly add to students speaking anxiety. Aqsa a participant, she expressed her feelings:

"My speaking anxiety start with the fear that I don't have proper vocabulary to convert my thoughts into words"

Pressure for Proper Speaking

A large number of students feel anxious while trying to speak with proper linguistically structured sentences. In comparison to other questions of the questionnaire 38.3% of the participants agree and strongly agree with the statement "I feel myself under pressure and upset to speak perfectly".

Zohra she expressed her taught that:

"Most of the foreigner professor know that I have a good reputation in my studies and they might expect that I am good in speaking English as well. I begin to think about their expectation, I keep feeling under pressure, whether I will be able to speak in a proper way"

Presentations

Class presentations is also one the main cause of speaking anxiety among the participants. It was found that the students feel self-conscious of making linguistic mistakes while presenting any topic in class. Ayrah Gul express this part by stating:

"During classroom presentation, when I present any topic in English, I become nervous because of making mistakes and feel that other may present better than me"

Communication Anxiety When Speaking English with Foreigners

The nature of the audience also can significantly make students anxious while explaining something to a non-native personnel's. Saba Tariq said that:

"I feel worry about using proper words during my communication with a non-native person".

Lack of Confidence

Last question "I have low confidence in English speaking" was certified by 24.8% of the participants by selecting agree or strongly agree option. This data suggest students were also conscious to build confidence of English speaking. In an interview Shifa kamal said :

"We need to build our confidence while speaking in English, because without confidence we cannot express our thoughts and also cannot convey our message to anyone properly"

Research Implications

Speaking English anxiety among students is influenced by many factors. Teachers and class fellows can play an important role to decrease anxiety through positive remarks. Daily speaking practice, presentations, interaction with foreigners and vocabulary build up can significantly improve the student's English speaking confidence. Moreover our data analysis also showed that students can manage their English speaking anxiety by relaxation, preparation and positive thinking about himself when participating in small discussion forum in English language.

Conclusion

Previous studies make it essential to highlight the main causes of speaking anxiety that have negative effects on students' speaking performance. Our data indicates that main causes of second language speaking anxiety (SLSA), as observed from the participants can be insufficient vocabulary, speaking practice, and socio-cultural related. There is limited research data available on English speaking anxiety in Pakistan, further studies are required to find out its practical and theoretical dimensions. In future comparative studies should be performed by collecting data from different universities students and teachers to understand deepen aspects of English Speaking Anxiety among undergraduate students.

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