

Foreign English Language Anxiety and Academic Performance of Students



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Abstract: *This study was to investigate the impact of foreign English language anxiety on academic performance of undergraduate students at universities, focusing on three specific types of language anxiety: listening anxiety (LA), speaking anxiety (SA), and writing anxiety (WA). The research involved a sample of 60 undergraduate students of two departments, used a questionnaire for survey with five-point Likert scale to measure their levels of anxiety. Findings exposed that both listening and speaking anxieties have a strong impact on students' academic performance, while writing anxiety has a comparatively weaker effect. The study recommended that educators should involve students in discussions to enhance listening skills, incorporate regular writing practice to improve writing skills, and engage students in speaking activities such as plays, workshops, and seminars to release speaking anxiety. Future research should explore culture and demographic factors influencing the relationship between foreign language anxiety and academic performance.*

Keywords: *Foreign language anxiety, Listening anxiety, Speaking anxiety, Writing anxiety, Students academic performance*

Introduction

The English language, which originated many years ago, has become a global lingua franca as a result of globalization. A major challenge faced by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students is the anxiety associated with learning a new language. According to Horwitz (2001), most EFL students experience varying levels of language anxiety, which significantly impacts their performance and success in language courses. Von Worde (2003) notes that previous research has consistently shown that such anxiety can impede both learning and performance in second or foreign language contexts, making it a critical issue for EFL learners. Celik and Yildiz (2019) emphasize that learning a foreign language broadens one's

global perspective. English, in particular, is often learned to enhance employment prospects and success in various life domains (Andayani, 2022). Effective self-management in learning can better prepare students for their careers (Yildiz & Yucedal, 2020). Receptive skills, such as reading and listening, are fundamental to comprehension and are prerequisites for productive skills like writing and speaking (Yildiz, 2020).

The importance of English writing for intercultural communication in the globalized world is highlighted by Lin and Ho (2009), and mastering a language involves more than understanding grammatical rules; it requires proficiency in speaking, writing, and listening (Ilhan & Tutkun, 2020). The lack of adequate

feedback in language learning can result in diminished student participation and challenges in assessing their performance (Celik et al., 2022). Writing is often considered the most difficult linguistic skill and is typically taught last, demanding considerable effort and time to master (Yildiz, 2019; Choi, 2013). Writing is a crucial skill for all EFL students, impacting various other academic areas (Karlina & Pancoro, 2018).

Statement of the Problem

Numerous fields in Pakistan show the dominance of English. English required for practical tests in Pakistan, whether for entrance, employment, or a scholarship. Consider that the subject of English Essay is one of the most challenging papers in the CSS and PCS competitive tests. For all disciplines taught in the majority of schools, colleges, and universities, with the exception of Urdu and Islamic Studies, the language of instruction is English. Major educational institutions also use it as a mode of communication. According to official statistics, 92% of applicants failed the English Essay in 2016, 2018, 89% and 2020, 97%. The primary objective of the present study is to investigate the impact of foreign English language anxiety on student academic performance in Kohat city. Mostly Pakistanis students have anxiety of English foreign language at school, college and university level. For example, you may feel wariness and anxiety in exam or a job interview or in test (oral, written). So the problem statement was to examine the impact of foreign English language anxiety on student academic performance.

Research Questions

- How does anxiety related to listening in a foreign English language influence students' academic performance?
- What effect of speaking anxiety in a foreign English language have on students' academic performance?
- In what ways does anxiety about writing in a foreign English language impact students' academic performance?

Objectives

Based on the research questions, the objectives of the study were:

- To investigate how anxiety related to listening in a foreign English language affects students' academic performance.
- To evaluate the effects of speaking anxiety in a foreign English language on students' academic performance.
- To analyze the impact of writing anxiety in a foreign English language on students' academic performance.

Significance of the Study

Learning a foreign language broadens the view of students, builds social skills, enhances their quality of life and obtains employment. It helps children develop skills like problem-solving and dealing with abstract ideas. Foreign English language increase fluency in speaking, writing and listening. It develops the competitive strength of the students in different competitive exams.

Scope of the Study

The research's focus was limited to university students only in Kohat. The data is collected from the students. The scope of the research was considered of the students of two department's (psychology and IT) studying in Kohat.

Literature Review

Foreign Language Anxiety

Foreign language anxiety is a well-researched phenomenon with nuanced definitions. It is often characterized as a complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors specific to the language learning process (Chen & Lin, 2019). Alternatively, it is framed as stress, anxiousness, and fear associated with learning a new language (Gkonou, 2020). Trait anxiety, a stable personality trait involving a persistent tendency to worry, has been linked to impaired cognitive performance and memory (Eysenck et al., 2015; Aydın, 2022). Situation-specific anxiety, experienced consistently in particular contexts over time, underscores the importance of considering various classroom

scenarios when studying foreign language anxiety (Gkonou & Mercer, 2017; MacIntyre & Mercer, 2016). Research distinguishes between debilitating anxiety, which negatively impacts performance and engagement by reducing class participation and increasing frustration (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2016; Hsu, 2021), and facilitating anxiety, which can enhance performance by motivating learners and aiding them in overcoming challenges (Dörnyei, 2019; Huang, 2023).

Foreign English Language Listening Anxiety

Listening, a critical language skill, poses significant challenges for non-native speakers and can generate notable levels of anxiety, particularly when language proficiency is limited (Krashen, as cited in Young, 1992). While speaking is often highlighted as the most anxiety-inducing skill, comprehension of spoken language is essential for effective communication. Listening comprehension anxiety can adversely affect speech production, underscoring the importance of addressing this issue, as comprehension is necessary for successful verbal interaction (Vogely, 1998). Despite extensive research on anxiety related to speaking, foreign language listening anxiety (FLLA) has received comparatively less attention (Elkhafaifi, 2005; Goh & Taib, 2006). Recent studies have begun to focus on FLLA, revealing a strong negative correlation between FLLA and listening proficiency, with low self-confidence in the target language contributing to this relationship (Kim, 2000; Lin, 2019). Research also indicates that FLLA is distinct from general foreign language learning anxiety and tends to decrease with higher academic levels, though gender does not significantly impact listening anxiety (Elkhafaifi, 2005; Liu & Chen, 2019).

Foreign English Language Speaking Anxiety

Foreign language speaking anxiety is a prevalent issue among English language learners and teachers. It can be challenging to distinguish whether a student's reluctance to communicate in the target language stems from a lack of motivation or heightened anxiety. Anxious learners often exhibit symptoms such as

sweating, palpitations, stress, forgetfulness, and difficulty acquiring the language. Speaking is frequently reported as the most intimidating language skill, causing significant stress and leading students to freeze during role-plays or speeches (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2016). Students' beliefs and fears about making mistakes and being corrected publicly contribute to their anxiety, as highlighted by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986). Matsuda and Gobel (2004) emphasized that group work can be effective in alleviating speaking anxiety, as it helps reduce communication apprehension and the fear of not understanding spoken messages. Horwitz et al. (1986) also noted that individuals who struggle with speaking in front of groups often face greater challenges in foreign language classes due to the lack of control over the communication environment and constant performance evaluation. Research has identified various factors contributing to anxiety, including speaking activities, comprehension difficulties, negative classroom experiences, and fear of negative evaluation, teaching methodologies, and the presence of native speakers (Wörde, 2003; Aida, 2020). Additionally, students experience anxiety during evaluative situations, such as tests and unprepared class participation (Mohamad & Wahid, 2009). Despite these challenges, avoiding speaking activities is not advisable. A supportive and positive learning environment is crucial for reducing speaking anxiety and helping learners build confidence in their language skills (Bown & White, 2023).

Foreign English Language Writing Anxiety

Students' reluctance to enroll in writing classes is influenced by high expectations set by both curricula and teachers (Cheng, 2004). Additionally, writing assignments for English classes and job applications contribute to writing anxiety (Cheng, 2004). Language phobia and proficiency in writing a foreign language are interconnected (Kara, 2011). Success in writing depends on a person's ability to communicate effectively, articulate thoughts coherently, and have self-confidence while benefiting from the second language (Baştürkmen & Lewis, 2002; Kara & Abdulrahman, 2022). Writing academic

papers requires strong cognitive skills, including the organization of ideas, intensive mental processing, and correct grammar usage (Erkan & Saban, 2011). The challenges students face in writing are significant due to its productive nature (Erkan & Saban, 2011). Worry has long been recognized as a barrier in second language acquisition, impacting students' writing skills (Kirmizi & Kirmizi, 2015). Writing is not only about knowledge but also involves emotional expression, which adds significance to the written content (Brand, 1987). Daly (1978) notes that some students are hesitant to write because they fear evaluation and judgment from educators. Sawyer et al. (1992) identify three factors contributing to foreign language writing anxiety: lack of academic competence, lack of self-confidence, and lack of motivation.

Foreign Language Anxiety and Academic Performance

Numerous studies have explored various elements influencing student performance and anxiety in foreign language learning. Research has demonstrated that foreign language proficiency is closely linked to foreign language anxiety (Ganschow & Sparks, 1996), teachers' perceptions (Cheng, Horwitz, & Schallert, 1999), students' self-assessments of their language skills (Dewaele et al., 2008), and self-esteem (Yamini & Tahriri, 2006). Horwitz et al. (1986) identified fear of poor grades, communication anxiety, and test anxiety as significant factors affecting academic performance and contributing to foreign language anxiety. Additionally, concerns about negative evaluations, including worries about peers' judgments and avoidance of evaluative situations, play a substantial role (Horwitz et al., 1986). Communication apprehension, particularly related to interpersonal interaction and oral expression, is associated with foreign language anxiety (Argaman & Abu-Rabia, 2002; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). Those with communication anxiety often experience similar anxieties when speaking a foreign language.

The impact of foreign language anxiety on academic achievement is shaped by interpersonal issues and personal traits such as low self-esteem and negative self-perceptions of

language abilities (Mahmoodzadeh, 2013; Young, 1991). Factors like fear of making mistakes, teachers' corrective actions, and speaking in front of peers or instructors significantly contribute to foreign language anxiety (Liu & Jackson, 2008). Learners' perceptions are crucial for understanding this anxiety (Dewaele, Petrides, & Furnham, 2008). Research by Bailey et al. (1999), Yamini and Tahriri (2006), and Young (1992) has highlighted the negative correlation between self-esteem and foreign language anxiety, noting that individuals with low self-esteem often experience increased anxiety due to concerns about others' opinions. The role of the teacher and the classroom environment also impact students' language performance. For instance, teachers calling on students during class can trigger anxiety, and the way teachers correct errors can be a source of concern (Aydin, 2008). Furthermore, teachers' attitudes and personalities are important indicators of language anxiety (Argaman & Abu-Rabia, 2002). Recent studies by Aydin (2016), Kurk (2018), Sammephet & Wanphet (2013), and Yoon (2012) support these observations.

The literature identifies six core factors influencing students' academic performance and foreign language anxiety, categorized into three main sources: the learner, the educator, and instructional practices. These factors are: 1) interpersonal and personal anxiety, 2) learners' beliefs about language learning, 3) classroom procedures, 4) teacher-centered methods, 5) teachers' beliefs about language teaching, and 6) language examinations (Young, 1991). Other significant factors include the classroom environment, learner characteristics, the target language, and the language learning process itself (Luo, 2012).

Theories

The Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982). This hypothesis suggests that affective factors such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence can act as a "filter" that influences the acquisition of a second language. High levels of anxiety are posited to raise the filter, thereby impeding the language learning process.

Cognitive Appraisal Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This theory posits that stress and anxiety arise from individuals' appraisal of a situation as threatening or challenging. It emphasizes how personal evaluations of

stressors impact emotional responses and coping strategies.

Conceptual Framework

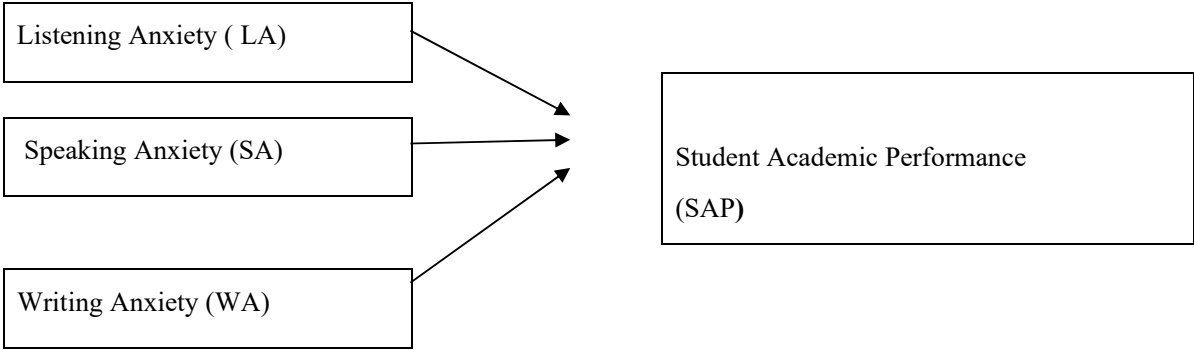


Figure: 1. Conceptual framework based on the Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982) and Cognitive Appraisal Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Hypothesis

H1: Anxiety related to listening in a foreign

English language significantly affects students' academic performance.

H2: Anxiety associated with speaking in a foreign English language significantly influences students' academic performance.

H3: Anxiety concerning writing in a foreign English language has a significant impact on students' academic performance.

Research Methodology

Population and Sample Size of the study

Table 1. List of Population

S.#	Population	Department	No of Students
1	participants	BS psychology	14
		MSC Psychology	4
		BS CS	39
		MCS	3

The population was the education sector university students of two departments (psychology and IT) in Kohat. The sample size of research study was 60 students studying in Kohat for collecting data from them.

Sampling Technique

Researcher selected the non-probability convenience type of techniques was used for collected data from the participants.

Measurement Instrument

Researchers used questionnaires to obtain data. All evaluating scale items were evaluated on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, where 1 denotes simple disagreement and 5 denotes strong agreement.

Researcher used SPSS software for statistical analysis of respondent data. SPSS-24 software was used to analyze the data that was gathered from respondents. It was used for reliability, frequency, descriptive, correlation and regression analysis.

Data Analysis Techniques

Reliability Test

Table 2. Reliability statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.794	4

Table showed that reliability value is .794 of 4 variables. According to the researchers if reliability value is 50 it is considered weak, if the reliability value is 60 it is considered acceptable, if the value is 70 it is considered good, if the

value is 80 it is considered very good and if the value is 90 and above it is considered excellent. So the reliability value of this research is .794 which is very good.

Frequency Test

Table 3. Sample Study Response Frequency

		University level Students	participants
N	Valid	60	60
	Missing	0	0

Table 4. Education

University level Students		Number of participants	percent	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	BS Psychology students	14	23.3	23.3	23.3
	Masters Psychology students	4	6.7	6.7	30.0
	BSCS students	39	65.0	65.0	95.0
	MCS students	3	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

In table respondent's response showed that 14(23.3%) students are BS psychology department and 4(6.7%) students are Masters of psychology department and 39(65%) students are BS computer science department and 3(5%) students are masters of computer science

department. Total number of (60) students were involved and cumulative percent is 100%. Questionnaire was divided among 60 students and got feedback of them.

Table 5. Gender

		Number of participants	percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Male	41	68.3	68.3	68.3
	Female	19	31.7	31.7	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

In table respondent's responses presented that number of male 41 that are 68.3% and number of female 19 that represent 31.7%.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mini	Maxi	Mean	Std. Deviation
LA	60	2	5	3	.5
SA	60	2	4	3	.4
WA	60	2	4	3	.5
SAP	60	2	5	3	.6
Valid N (listwise)	60				

Table showed that respondent selected option 2 (Disagree) minimum and option 5 (Strongly agree) maximum of LA. Its mean was 3 and std.deviation .5 Respondent selected option 2 (Disagree) minimum and option 4 (Agree) maximum of SA. Its mean was 3 and std.deviation .4 Respondent selected option 2

(Disagree) minimum and option 4 (Agree) maximum of WA. Its mean was 3 and std.deviation .5 Respondent selected option 2 (Disagree) minimum and option 5 (Strongly agree) maximum of SAP. Its mean was 3 and std.deviation .6

Correlation Analysis

Table 7. Correlation Analysis

		LA	SA	WA	SAP
LA	Sig.	1			
	N	60			
	Correlation	.530**	1		
SA	Sig.	.000			
	N	60	60		
	Correlation	.408**	.494**	1	
WA	Sig.	.001	.000		
	N	60	60	60	
	Correlation	.565**	.637**	.363**	1
SAP	Sig.	.000	.000	.004	
	N	60	60	60	60

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The above table showed the relationship between the variables. The relationship of LA is .530 with SA which has strong positive

relationship and significant level is .000. The relationship of LA is .408 with WA which has strong positive relationship and significant level

is .001. The relationship of LA is .565 with SAP which has strong positive relationship and significant level is .000. The relationship of SA is .494 with WA which has strong positive relationship and significant level is .000. The

relationship of SA is .637 with SAP which has strong positive relationship and significant level is .000. The relationship of WA is .363 with SAP which has strong positive relationship and significant level is .004.

Regression Analysis

Table 8. Model Summary

Model	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.993 ^a	.985	.984	.44602

a. Predictors: WA, LA, SA

b. Dependent Variable: SAP

Table model summary showed that the value of R is .993, the value of R square is .985, the value

of Adjusted R Square is .984 and the value of Std. Error of the Estimate is .44602.

Table 9. ANOVA

Model		Sum of 2	Df	Mean 2	F	Sig.
1	Regression	753.781	3	251.260	1263.037	.000 ^c
	Residual	11.339	57	.199		
	Total	765.120 ^d	60			

a. Dependent Variable: SAP

b. Predictors: WA, LA, SA

Table showed the F value 1263.03 with significant level .000. Overall, the ANOVA table tells us that researcher regression model is

statistically significant and is a good fit for the data.

Table 10. Coefficients

Coefficients

Model		Coefficients Unstandardized		Standardized	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	LA	.344	.117	.360	2.943	.005
	SA	.603	.136	.623	4.445	.000
	WA	.012	.111	.012	.104	.917

a. Dependent Variable: SAP

b. Linear Regression through the Origin

Table showed that the value of beta of LA is .360, t value is 2.943 with significant level .005 of LA. The value of beta of SA is .623, t value is 4.445 with significant level .000 of SA. The value of beta of WA is .012, t value is .104 with

significant level .917 of WA. This showed that LA and SA have positive effect on the student's academic performance and WA has very weak effect on student's academic performance.

Findings, conclusion and Recommendations

Limitation of the Study

Because of the time pressure and financial constraints this studies was limited to Preston University Kohat Pakistan. Moreover the study is limited to students of Psychology and IT department of Preston University.

Findings

1. Researcher findings showed that listening anxiety (LA) has strong impact on students' academic performance.
2. Speaking anxiety (SA) has strong impact on students' academic performance.
3. Writing anxiety (WA) has weak impact on students' academic performance

Uniqueness of the Study

The main uniqueness of the study lies in its comparative analysis of how different types of language anxiety: listening anxiety, speaking anxiety, and writing anxiety affect students' academic performance, revealing that listening and speaking anxieties have a strong impact while writing anxiety has a weaker effect.

Contribution to the Theories:

The Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982) suggests that high levels of anxiety act as a filter that hinders language acquisition, which supports with the study's finding that listening and speaking anxieties significantly hinder academic performance by disrupting language processing and communication. The study refines the hypothesis, demonstrating that not all anxieties affect language acquisition equally

The Communication Apprehension Theory (McCroskey, 1977) suggests that apprehension about communicating in a foreign language leads to reduced performance, which supports the study's observation that speaking anxiety, in particular, has a substantial effect on academic outcomes due to increased fear and avoidance of oral communication. The study contributes to this theory by specifying that speaking anxiety, more than writing anxiety, significantly impedes academic performance

Future Research

Future research should explore culture and demographic factors influencing the relationship between foreign language anxiety and academic performance at college and school level in Kohat or in other cities.

Recommendations

1. To improve listening skills of the students, teachers should involve the students in discussion
2. To improve the students writing skills, make practices of writing activities.
3. To improve the speaking skills of students' teachers should involve students to participate in speaking activities, and attend plays, workshops, seminars.

These activities would encourage them to learn and appreciate foreign languages learning without apprehension.

Conclusion

This study examined how different types of foreign English language anxiety specifically listening, speaking, and writing affect students' academic performance. The findings indicate that listening and speaking anxieties have a prominent impact on students' performance, while writing anxiety has a less significant effect. The study highlighted that listening and speaking anxieties are stronger than writing anxiety To address these issues, the study recommends improving listening through interactive discussions, enhancing writing through regular practice, and fostering speaking skills with diverse activities. Future research should consider additional variables and contexts to further explore the complexities of language anxiety and its influence on academic performance.

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