

**Language Anxiety over EFL/ESL Oral exam/test Performance:  
A View from Language Classrooms at Mehran University of  
Engineering and Technology Jamshoro Sindh, Pakistan**

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**Abstract**

This study was conducted in order to highlight second/foreign language classroom anxiety over EFL/ESL oral exam/test performance at Mehran University of Engineering and Technology Jamshoro, Sindh, Pakistan. Study was based on quantitative approach. Participants of the study were 227 students, who were selected randomly. Students were given a questionnaire to answer, adopted by Horwitz and Cope (1987) based on five point Likert Scale. Scale is basically designed to measure Communicative Apprehension, Test/Exam Anxiety and Fear of Negative Evaluation, while in this study in order to measure oral Exam/Test performance, the second portion of the Scale "Test/Exam Anxiety" was followed. Moreover the findings of the study concluded that a moderate level of anxiety was prevalent among undergraduates of MUET firstly. Secondly, findings of the study concluded that MUET undergraduates have moderate level of anxiety worrying how they could achieve good grades in each exam. Consequently findings of the study also direct us towards affective assessment of learners at Mehran University of Engineering and Technology Jamshoro, Sindh, Pakistan.

**Key Words:** Test/Exam Anxiety, speaking anxiety, oral performance, self-confidence, Communicative Apprehension

**Introduction**

The present study is designed to explain the foreign language classroom anxiety over EFL/ESL Oral exam/test Performance. Since anxiety is a major obstacle between learners and

their target. This study examines communication apprehension to determine language anxiety over EFL/ESL oral exam/test performance of undergraduates at MUET Jamshoro. Though there is much study done in the context of language anxiety in Pakistan, there is a significant need to highlight the anxiety and anxiety related problems at the university level in Sindh, Pakistan. Consequently, it provides a clear image of speaking anxiety during oral performance among undergraduate learners, to Pakistani researchers in particular and language teachers in general.

## **Literature Review**

English language has been used as the most common language around the world and it is declared as lingua Franca, language to use or communicate globally. The most prominent characteristic of the language is communication, though there are different reasons behind the spread of the language, for instance, the colonization of the united states of America around the world, another reason is invention and use of the computer more than that the installation of English language as operating language on the computer. Consequently, English became the language of education, science, politics and technology. About fifty years back English language was limited to theoretical predictions but now it is used globally and it is no more any theoretical prediction. "A language gains a status as a global language when it has a special role that is recognized in every country in the world (Crystal, 1997, cited in Rohmah 2005).

People need to have a grip on the language to avail more and better opportunities; moreover, English language is not an interesting language to learn, it has no charm to learn it intrinsically. In fact it is extrinsically interesting to be master for instance having more opportunities in academic and professional careers.

In Pakistan English language is used as second language as it is declared as official language. Constantly it is due on everyone to master the language academically and professionally. On the road to mastering the language there come some ups and downs, for instance if one feels confident while learning the language the other one may feel demotivated, one may have positive and negative learning attitudes towards learning the language; likewise,

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among all other factors like attitude, motivation, aptitude, anxiety is the most researched factor which increases defecting elements in learning the language among learners.

Anxiety is defined by various researchers - one among them is by Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope (1986), "a distinct complex of self-perception, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (P.128 Gopang et al. 2015).

Moreover, speaking anxiety has three components, introduced by Horwitz & Cope in FLCAS: (1) communication apprehension (2) test anxiety and (3) fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension refers to anxiety which students feel while communicating with others, test anxiety refers to fear of exams, and finally fear of negative evaluation which refers to the fear of being misunderstood by others. The viewed anxiety is a combination of the above three components; further it is divided into two major elements of anxiety, debilitating anxiety and facilitating anxiety. Debilitating anxiety concludes in abandoned learning and facilitating anxiety concludes in facilitating learning; it arises as a sense of worry towards learning which leads to struggles to achieve the target. Horwitz & Cope as illustrating anxiety arising in unique situation make sense to put language speaking anxiety in the category of situation-specific anxiety as well. Constantly Horwitz & Cope (1986) argues that language anxiety arises in specific situation. If talking about specific situations, learners might feel anxiety during speaking with fellows, teachers and native speakers, or learners might feel nervous during performing in class while giving presentations, dialogues and so on.

Researchers have suggested considering anxiety from a situation specific perspective. (Ellis, 2008; Horwitz 2001; Horwitz & Young, 1991; MacIntyre, 1999) Dornyei 2001 argued that language classroom students inherently face a threatening environment, where learners are expected to perform through the use of a severely restricted language code. This is the reason anxiety arises in specific situations which are uniquely threatening. Consequently learning environment affects learners on a different individualistic note. Some learners get anxious at high level and some get anxious at low level, especially during communicative activities. Reaction of

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the learners depend on their individualistic abilities, individual attitudes towards language and individual socio-educational background; learners and their performance in second/foreign language learning are generally evaluated on these grounds. However, Horwitz et al. (1986) argued, that "an individual's communication attempts will be evaluated according to uncertain or even unknown linguistic or socio-cultural standards; second language communication entails risk-taking and is necessarily problematic" (P. 128).

Keeping all perspective in view it is quite problematic for learners to perform without feeling any problem. Above all what a learner thinks of himself has been found to be the most problematic factor. McIntyre and Gardner (1991) have argued that "anxious individuals think about their own reaction to a task in addition to the demands of the task itself" (P. 297). Weak input creates a sense of doubt about the ability of learner towards accomplishing the task, which becomes the concrete hurdle towards fluency of foreign language in classroom during a task. Researchers have also explored links between anxiety level and various aspects of speaking skills. Phillips (1992), for instance, examined the potential effects of anxiety on performance variables related to the quantity and quality of the oral output, she has found that students with high anxiety said less, produced shorter communication units, and used fewer dependent clauses and target structures than those whose anxiety level was lower. Constantly it can be estimated that weak output is one of the serious reasons for language anxiety.

Keeping in mind the previous theoretical grounds of language anxiety, this study has been designed to illustrate language anxiety over EFL/ESL oral exam/test performance at Mehran University of Engineering and Technology Jamshoro, Sindh, Pakistan.

### **Researches on Foreign Language Learning Anxiety**

An uncountable number of researches has been done on foreign language speaking anxiety around the world and multiple challenges have been discovered by researchers caused by anxiety effecting learners strongly in debilitating or facilitating way.

One of the studies conducted in 2012 by Trang et al. at a university in Vietnam on the investigation of anxiety students experienced while learning English as a foreign language in order to find out whether anxiety is effected on their determination of studying English or not; the study concluded that students should be informed of the importance of learning English.

Another study conducted in 2015 at Lasbela University Pakistan by Gopang et al. suggested that mostly students feel nervous and avoid speaking English and students face speaking anxiety inside and outside of class, students feel more nervous while speaking with native speakers. Furthermore, the study declares speaking anxiety as a serious issue of undergraduate students in Pakistan.

Consequently, the study conducted by Smith & Schroth in 2014 at the University of Southeastern region of United states, reveals that students who remain normal, earn high grades. Results also indicate that outside factors like less amount of sleep and lack of preparation often contributed to anxiety. Study also reveals that speaking anxiety can affect classroom performance.

Present study is concerned with highlighting the role of foreign language learning students' anxiety and comparing the level of speaking anxiety in major - English students and other students not majoring in English at the University of Sindh, Jamshoro. The practical implications or benefits of the study are to create an awareness regarding the level of speaking anxiety experienced by learners during oral performance in different situations and to provide some suggestions to concerned teachers to tackle the problem.

### **Research Questions**

Following is the major research question designed by researcher:

- To determine language anxiety over EFL/ESL oral exam/test performance of undergraduates at Mehran University of Engineering and Technology Jamshoro, Sindh Pakistan.

Focusing above main question the researchers answered the questions below:

1. What is the level of language anxiety over EFL/ESL oral exam performance among undergraduates at Mehran University of Engineering and Technology Sindh Jamshoro?
2. How is oral exam performance of undergraduates at Mehran University of Engineering and Technology Sindh Jamshoro?
3. How does language anxiety affect individualistic perspectives regarding oral performance in undergraduates at Mehran University of Engineering and Technology Sindh Jamshoro?

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

The learners participated in this study are 227 undergraduate Engineering students at Mehran University of Engineering and Technology, Jamshoro. Students are randomly selected to collect data from students who are studying Functional English and Communicative Skills.

### **Instrument**

The instrument adopted for this study is Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCAS) originated by Horwitz & Cope. (1987) The FLCAS is based on the five point Likert scale. FLCAS measures the speaking anxiety at three parts, communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. This study only borrows and applies the second section "Test anxiety" which measures Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety in writing or tests and exams, performed in second/foreign language. Moreover the instrument is significantly valid and reliable or for used in multiple studies on foreign/second speaking anxiety worldwide.

### **Data Collection**

Survey method is followed to gather data under consideration of all ethical issues concerned. Participants were given a time of 20 minutes to answer 33 statements provided in the questionnaire. Learners participated voluntarily and were informed that it does not affect their grades at any stage.

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## Data Analyses

Data is analyzed through SPSS, all the statements are individually analyzed to determine test/exam anxiety among Engineering undergraduates at MUET. Constantly by measurement of the variables all three research questions are answered.

### Item No 2:

	Frequenc y	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly agree	60	27.3	27.3	27.3
Agree	90	40.9	40.9	68.2
Disagree	61	27.7	27.7	95.9
Strongly Disagree	9	4.1	4.1	100.0
Total	220	100.0	100.0	

Table 1.1 shows test anxiety among engineering undergraduates

Table 1.1 shows the consciousness of students towards making mistakes. It shows that 95.9% learners disagree on not feeling worried about making mistakes in class, which just 68.2% agree that they feel worried about making mistakes.

### Item No 8:

	Frequenc y	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly agree	39	17.7	17.7	17.7
Agree	125	56.8	56.8	74.5
Disagree	45	20.5	20.5	95.0
Strongly Disagree	11	5.0	5.0	100.0

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Total	220	100.0	100.0
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Table 1.2 shows test anxiety among engineering undergraduates

Table 1.2 shows level of feeling easy with language tests in language classes. Again 95.0% learners disagree on feeling easy while 74.5% agree. It concludes that majority of learners do not feel easy during tests in language classes.

**Item No 10:**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly agree	37	16.8	16.8	16.8
Agree	94	42.7	42.7	59.5
Disagree	63	28.6	28.6	88.2
Strongly Disagree	26	11.8	11.8	100.0
Total	220	100.0	100.0	

Table 1.3 shows test anxiety among engineering undergraduates

Table shows that 88.2% learners disagree on feeling worries about failing consequences in language class, it can be estimated that the major concern of the learners is related with the moment of exam; they do not think about future loss that might be brought about by the failure in the exam. It shows low level of test anxiety in learners.

**Item No 19:**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly agree	51	23.2	23.2	23.2
Agree	69	31.4	31.4	54.5
Disagree	79	35.9	35.9	90.5



Strongly Disagree	21	9.5	9.5	100.0
Total	220	100.0	100.0	

Table 1.4 shows test anxiety among engineering undergraduates

Table shows fear of learners towards interference of teachers and pointing the mistakes learners are making. It shows that 90.5% learners disagree which concludes that students are not afraid as they believe mistakes are a part of learning.

**Item No 21:**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly agree	29	13.2	13.2	13.2
Agree	47	21.4	21.4	34.5
Disagree	96	43.6	43.6	78.2
Strongly Disagree	48	21.8	21.8	100.0
Total	220	100.0	100.0	

Table 1.5 shows test anxiety among engineering undergraduates.

Table shows the level of anxiety in learners, it shows that 78.2% learners strongly disagree on feeling more anxious as they study. It concludes that learners do not get anxiety with more study.

**Conclusion**

Results show moderate level of test anxiety occurs in specific situations with positive influences of facilitating anxiety in MUET undergraduates during test/exam oral performance, learners find themselves able to control test anxiety level when preparing well for exams. The more they study the less they feel test anxiety. Less anxiety directs us towards their high level of

self-confidence concerning their achievement. The results also conclude why MUET undergraduates have good grades in each exam; it is due to their high level of confidence and low level of anxiety achieved with good preparations of tasks. Language anxiety does not affect learners negatively. Though majority of learners do not feel easy during tests or oral performance in language classes 95.9% learners disagree on not feeling worried about making mistakes in class.

Moreover 88.2% learners disagree on feeling worried about failing consequences in language class, it can be estimated that the major concern of the learners is related to the moment of exam; they have situation specific anxiety, they do not think about future loss that might be brought about by the failure in exam, because facilitating anxiety effects positively, students are not afraid as they believe mistakes are a part of learning. Simultaneously, 78.2% learners strongly disagree on feeling more anxious as they study; learners feel low level of anxiety when they prepare well for their task which is the reason behind getting good grades by undergraduates at MUET Jamshoro. Trang et al. at a university in Vietnam did an investigation on the anxiety students experienced during learning English as a foreign language, in order to find out whether anxiety has affected their determination of studying English or not; study concluded that students should be informed of the importance of learning English. Moreover, Gopang et al. (2015) suggested that mostly students feel nervous and avoid speaking English, students face speaking anxiety inside and outside of class, and students feel more nervous while speaking with native speakers; furthermore the study declares speaking anxiety as a serious issue of undergraduate students in Pakistan while findings of this study neglect the generalization of Gopang et al. (2015) Study proved MUET undergraduates do not feel high level of anxiety. Findings of this study also concluded that students should be well aware of their task. Study was also directed towards affective assessment of learners; by the results of this study we can estimate that learners have been provided enough teaching and practice followed by affective teaching plans; learners have been aware of how to study and how to prepare for tests and achieve well in the tests when keeping their anxiety at low level and their self-confidence at high level.

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## Appendix Questionnaire

**Participant's details.**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Class:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Gender:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Age:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Department:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Contact:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. I do not worry about making mistakes in language class.  
 (a) Strongly Agree                      (b) Agree                      (c) Disagree                      (d) Strongly Disagree

2. I am usually at easy during tests in my language class.

(a)Strongly Agree            (b) Agree            (c) Disagree            (d) Strongly Disagree

3. I worry about THE consequences of failing my foreign language class.

(a)Strongly Agree            (b) Agree            (c) Disagree            (d) Strongly Disage

4. I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.

(a)Strongly Agree            (b) Agree            (c) Disagree            (d) Strongly Disagree

5. I can feel my heart pounding when I am going to be called on in language class.

(a)Strongly Agree            (b) Agree            (c) Disagree            (d) Strongly Disagree

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