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**BREAKING THE SILENCE: COMMUNICATION ANXIETY IN
THE HIGHER SECONDARY ESL CLASSROOM**

**Syed Asim Ali Shah Bukhari^{*1}, Rubina Shaheen²,
Sajid Ali Shar³**

*^{*1}Lecturer in English / In-charge BS English, Benazir
Bhutto Shaheed University of Technology and Skill
Development, Khairpur Mirs, Pakistan*

*²Assistant Professor, Institute of English Language and
Literature, Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur, Sindh,
Pakistan*

³Lecturer of English, Cadet College Khairpur, Pakistan

*^{*1}asim@bbsutsd.edu.pk,²drowsylaked_eye@yahoo.com,
³realistic005@gmail.com*



Abstract

This research investigates the multifaceted phenomenon of communication anxiety among Higher Secondary English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. The research aims to identify the level of communication anxiety among the ESL students and to explore how the personal, classroom, and cultural-linguistic factors contribute to communication anxiety self-confidence, introversion, social anxiety, accent and first language; likewise, it also investigate the effect of anxiety on the ESL classroom participation of ESL students and academic performance, and to elaborate whether there were gender differences in communication anxiety. The research is quantitative in nature, and the population comprises higher secondary schools of the district Khairpur, Sindh. The sample size comprises two hundred students, equally distributed between both genders from four higher secondary schools of the district Khairpur. The statistical data collected were analyzed through SPSS, the latest version, using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, multiple regression analysis, and t-tests. The results showed that a moderate to high level of communication anxiety was found in 78.5% of the ESL students.

Keywords: *Communication Anxiety, Higher Secondary Schools, ESL Classrooms. ESL students.*

INTRODUCTION:

The issue of communication anxiety has become a determining factor of affective importance in the field of second language acquisition, especially in English as a Second Language (ESL) situations, wherein the learner must actively engage in classroom conversations. It has been repeatedly shown that learners with a high degree of communication anxiety are prone to avoiding speaking activities and tasks, oral presentations, as well as interactive classroom activities, thus reducing the opportunities of engaging in a meaningful language practice and advancement (Yashima et al., 2018). Communication anxiety is expressed through a fear of negative judgment, lack of self-confidence, physical symptoms, and anxiety in the process of oral communication, which can prevent the readiness of learners to use English (Wang et al., 2022; Xue and Noels, 2025). Such anxiety can be a major barrier to language proficiency development, classroom interaction, and general academic achievement in a classroom, especially at the higher secondary level (Afsar et al., 2023).

A combination of personal, classroom, and socio-cultural factors accentuates the effect of communication anxiety. Such personal factors as low self-esteem, introversion, and social anxiety have been cited as strong predictors of communication apprehension in ESL learners (Wang et al., 2022). The relationship between the teacher and the students in classrooms, which includes the judgment of peers, and feedback practices are decisive determinant in either reducing or enhancing the level of anxiety among learners (Yashima et al., 2018). Additionally, the cultural and linguistic factors, including the fear of being discriminated against due to accent, the predominance of the original language, and the conscientious socio-cultural beliefs, also play their role in increasing the level of anxiety, especially in those areas where participation in classrooms is traditionally inhibited (Xue and Noels, 2025). All of these aspects combined influence the experiences of learners and define their rates of engagement in the ESL classroom.

Although there is an increasing amount of literature on language anxiety, the empirical studies on communication anxiety in ESL higher secondary students are scarce, and the study on communication anxiety among higher secondary students in Khairpur. This gap becomes especially high considering the cultural, linguistic, and educational peculiarities of the region, when students can easily experience a high level of social pressure and lack of exposure to communicative features of the English language (Mulyani, 2018). The current research fills this gap by exploring the causes and consequences of communication anxiety on classroom attendance, academic achievement, and the acquisition of language among ESL students in the higher secondary level in Khairpur. This research will be

used to quantify the communication anxiety, determine the personal, classroom, and cultural predictors of communication anxiety, and establish the effects of communication anxiety on the academic performance of learners. The importance of the study is that it can potentially enlighten teachers, curriculum designers, and policymakers on the emotional barriers that affect ESL learners to guide them towards creating supportive teaching methods and anxiety-relieving language learning classrooms that can support language learning and academic success (Wang et al., 2022).

Research Objectives

The objectives of the present research are to examine the degree of communication anxiety among higher secondary ESL learners during classroom activities and how such anxiety can be influenced by person-related elements such as self-esteem, introversion, and social anxiety, classroom-related issues such as teacher-student interaction and peer judgment, and contextual and linguistic factors such as an emphasis on the first language and accent issues. Additionally, it explores the influence of communication anxiety on both classroom performance and academic performance of learners, and in addition delves into whether there are gender differences regarding the experience of communication anxiety in the case of ESL learners.

Research Questions

These are the following research questions are:

1. What is the level of classroom communication anxiety among higher secondary ESL learners in Khairpur?
2. How do self-esteem, introversion, and social anxiety shape the communication apprehension experienced by ESL students?
3. To what extent do cultural and linguistic variables, specifically native language and accent, influence communication apprehension among ESL learners in Khairpur?

Literature Review

A literature review is a critical overview of existing research on a specific topic. Rather than just a list of summaries, it synthesizes information to show the current state of knowledge, identify gaps, and provide a foundation for new research (Ahmad et al., 2022; Maitlo et al., 2023; Yousaf et al., 2025). Its function is to provide the foundation for new research (Ahmad et al., 2023; Maitlo et al., 2025). A literature review acts as a critical bridge between existing knowledge and your new research, ensuring your work is relevant and well-grounded (Jalbani et al., 2023; Maitlo et al., 2024; Shaheen et al., 2025). In a nutshell, its importance lies in its ability to justify, contextualize, and strengthen your academic efforts (Rao et al., 2023; Ansari et al., 2025).

Communication anxiety in the higher secondary English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom, frequently termed as "speaking anxiety" or "reticence," represents a significant emotional barrier that restricts students from engaging in productive classroom communication. Literature consistently points to a "silence phenomenon," where students at this level often demonstrate reluctance to participate, avoidance behaviors, and low self-confidence, leading to reduced opportunities for meaningful language practice. A recent study found that a moderate to high level of communication anxiety affects roughly 78.5% of higher secondary learners, with female students often reporting higher anxiety levels than their male counterparts. The causes of this anxiety are multifaceted, predominantly categorized into personal factors (low self-esteem, introversion, fear of failure), classroom environment factors (unsupportive atmosphere, fear of peer ridicule), and cultural-linguistic barriers (lack of vocabulary, accent anxiety, or fear of negative evaluation by the teacher). The impact of this anxiety is often devastating to academic performance, as it creates a vicious cycle where fear of making mistakes leads to silence, resulting in limited speaking practice, which in turn reinforces low proficiency and further anxiety (Ahmad, Rao & Rao, 2023). To break this silence, researchers emphasize the need for a shift towards learner-centered, low-anxiety classrooms, encouraging strategies such as positive reinforcement, collaborative pair work, and treating errors as natural steps in language acquisition rather than punishable mistakes.

Key themes from the literature regarding this topic include:

1. **Psychological Factors:** Fear of negative evaluation by peers and teachers is the most prevalent contributor, leading to "avoidance behavior" (e.g., staying silent, skipping class).
2. **Classroom Dynamics:** Teacher-centered methods and high-stakes testing, common in higher secondary education, increase anxiety, whereas a supportive, friendly atmosphere encourages voluntary participation.
3. **Linguistic Challenges:** A lack of vocabulary and difficulties with pronunciation frequently prompt students to use their mother tongue, increasing anxiety when forced to speak English.

4. **Mitigation Strategies:** Research suggests that reducing the "affective filter" through positive thinking, preparation strategies, and relaxation techniques can help learners overcome this barrier.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for addressing communication anxiety in the higher secondary ESL classroom is grounded in the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) model, which identifies communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety as the primary psychological barriers to oral participation. At the higher secondary level, this framework integrates Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, positing that high levels of stress and low self-confidence act as a "filter" that blocks comprehensible input and prevents language acquisition. The framework further delineates a multi-dimensional relationship where personal factors such as introversion and low self-esteem, classroom environment, teacher-student rapport, peer judgment, and cultural-linguistic variables accent anxiety and perceived language inadequacy serve as independent predictors of anxiety. These factors collectively trigger avoidance behaviors, most notably learner silence and reluctance to engage, which lead to a stagnant learning cycle and diminished academic achievement. Consequently, the framework proposes that mitigating this silence requires a transition toward learner-centered, humanistic approaches that utilize scaffolding speaking tasks and non-judgmental feedback to lower the affective filter and foster communicative competence.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for communication anxiety in the higher secondary ESL classroom is best understood through a multi-dimensional lens that combines Psychological, Socio-educational, and Cognitive-Affective models. At its core, the framework centers on Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that high levels of anxiety, low self-confidence, and poor motivation act as a "mental block" or filter. When this filter is raised, it prevents "comprehensible input" from reaching the brain's language acquisition device, essentially paralyzing the learner's ability to process and produce language. This is further reinforced by McCroskey's Communication Apprehension Theory, which explains that the fear of real or anticipated communication, especially in a non-native language, leads students to avoid classroom participation and oral exams to escape perceived linguistic failure.

Complementing these are the social and interactional dimensions provided by MacIntyre and Gardner's Socio-educational Model and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory. MacIntyre and Gardner describe language anxiety as a situation-specific phenomenon where the interaction between personal traits (like introversion) and the classroom environment (like fear of negative evaluation by peers) creates a cycle of avoidance and reduced proficiency. From a Vygotskian perspective, communication anxiety disrupts the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD); without a supportive "scaffold" from teachers or more capable peers, the social interaction required for cognitive development is severed. Together, these theories suggest that higher secondary ESL students suffer from a "loop of anxiety" where the fear of being judged for their accent or grammar, often exacerbated by high-pressure academic settings, leads to silence, which then stunts the very practice needed to build the confidence required to break it.

Material and Methods

Research methodology is the systematic plan or "blueprint" used to conduct a study, ensuring that results are valid, reliable, and address specific research objectives (Ahmad et al., 2021; Khokhar et al., 2025). While research methods are the specific tools (e.g., surveys, interviews), research methodology provides the logical framework and justification for choosing those tools (Cheema et al., 2023; Ahmad et al., 2025; Murtaza et al., 2025). In this study, a quantitative research method was used to investigate the influence of communication anxiety on ESL students in the higher secondary level in District Khairpur, Pakistan. To measure the levels of communication anxiety and provide statistical analysis of its dependence on classroom participation and academic results, a quantitative design was believed to be the right type of study to include. This study was conducted under a hypothesis-testing design, so it was possible to use the inferential statistical methods to establish patterns, relationships, and factors predictive of communication anxiety. Independent variables included personal factors, classroom settings, and cultural-linguistic influences, whereas dependent outcomes were communication anxiety and academic performance. Such a design facilitated the objective evaluation of the anxiety manifestations within EML classrooms and their impact on the engagement and performance of ESL students.

The study population included ESL students in Grade 11 and Grade 12 in both public and private institutions of higher learning in the district of Khairpur. Contributors were also chosen using a purposive sampling method since they were directly involved in ESL learning and would tend to feel the anxiety of communication within the classroom. This sampling technique was appropriate since it helped the researcher narrow down learners who had

characteristic features of interest; as such, the data obtained would directly address the objectives of the study. Four educational institutions were selected to take a total sample of two hundred ESL students, and they were equally split in terms of gender so as to provide a chance of comparing gender differences in communication anxiety. Despite the non-random computation of the sample, the sample gave a comprehensive and contextually similar representation of ESL learners in the higher secondary level within District Khairpur, Pakistan.

A structured questionnaire was administered to gather data that were required to evaluate the communication anxiety and communication anxiety-relevant factors among ESL learners. The instrument was used to collect demographic data and measure communication anxiety with such indicators as communication apprehension, fear of negative ratings, self-confidence, and physical signs of anxiety. It also investigated the factors pertaining to individual factors, classroom environment variables, and cultural-linguistic influences based on accent and socio-cultural background. A five-point Likert scale was used to record the responses so that people could indicate different levels of agreement. Data were analyzed in SPSS to summarize demographic characteristics and levels of anxiety with descriptive statistics, whereas inferential statistics were used to test the hypothesis. The relationships between communication anxiety and academic performance were analyzed with the help of correlation and regression; inferential tests were conducted to investigate gender differences. This analytic process fostered a procedural appreciation of the interaction between communication anxiety and classroom contribution and percentile performances of ESL students within the educational setting of the study.

Research Findings

The distribution of the respondents according to their gender is shown in the very first figure, which shows that there is almost equal representation of both male and female learners of ESL, which makes effective comparison of the components of communication anxiety between the two genders. Figure two is a representation of the age distribution, with most of the participants representing the age bracket of a typical higher secondary age distribution, hence developmental relevance to classroom communication anxiety. Figure three illustrates the academic level of the participants by ensuring that all respondents were learning in Grade 11 or Grade 12, in accordance with the target population in the study. Figure four shows the representative aspect of institutions, and it shows equal representation of different schools and colleges in Khairpur, which improves the contextual validity of the results on communication anxiety and academic performance.

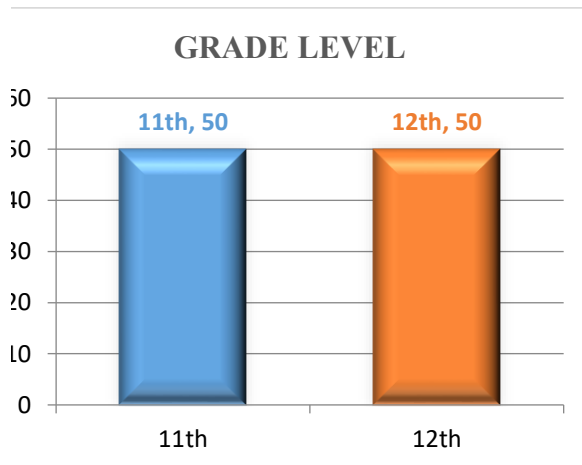
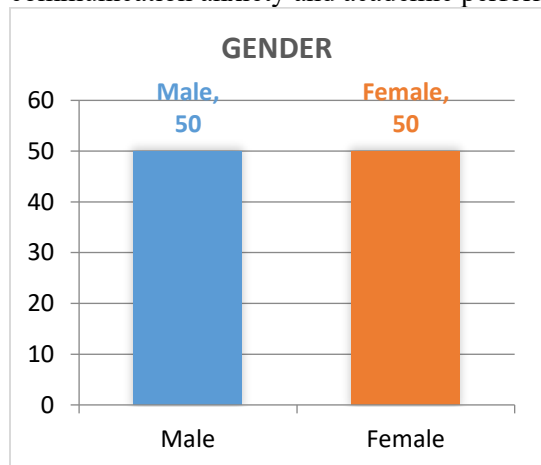


Figure 1. Gender

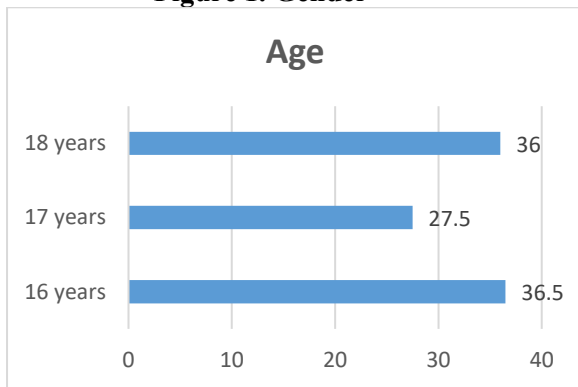


Figure 2. Students' Grade Level

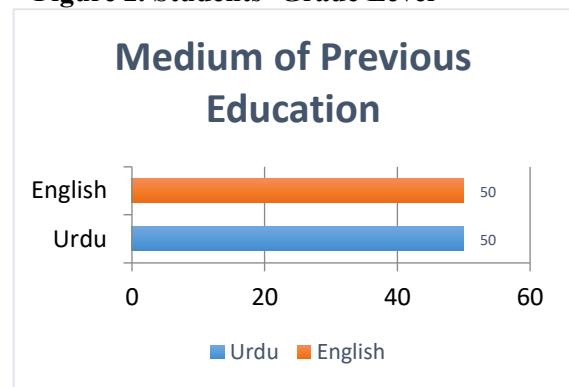


Figure 3. Student's Age

Figure 4. Medium of Previous Education

Data from Table 1 reveal a moderate to high level of communication anxiety among ESL learners at the higher secondary level in Khairpur, with mean scores consistently falling between 3.27 and 3.55. Key findings from the study include: **Peer Pressure:** A significant majority of participants expressed strong agreement that they feel nervous, tense, or anxious when speaking English, particularly during group activities or in front of peers. **Psychological Barriers:** High levels of anticipatory anxiety and a persistent fear of making mistakes were reported, leading to noticeable discomfort and a tendency to avoid speaking tasks. **Prevalence:** Overall, the results indicate that communication anxiety is a pervasive and significant challenge within this specific classroom population.

Table 1:
Descriptive Statistics for Communication Anxiety

Statement	SD (f, %)	D (f, %)	N (f, %)	A (f, %)	SA (f, %)	Mean	SD
Feel nervous when having to speak English in front of the class.	27 (13.5%)	31 (15.5%)	28 (14.0%)	50 (30.0%)	54 (27.0%)	3.42	1.38
Get anxious when you know will be asked to speak English.	29 (14.5%)	31 (15.5%)	34 (17.0%)	52 (26.0%)	54 (27.0%)	3.35	1.40
Find it difficult to start conversations in English during class.	28 (14.0%)	27 (13.5%)	31 (15.5%)	58 (29.0%)	56 (28.0%)	3.44	1.39
Speaking English during group activities makes me uncomfortable.	30 (15.0%)	24 (12.0%)	32 (16.0%)	53 (26.5%)	51 (30.5%)	3.46	1.42
Avoid situations where you might have to speak English in front of others.	26 (13.0%)	32 (16.0%)	28 (14.0%)	54 (32.0%)	50 (25.0%)	3.40	1.36
Feel physically uncomfortable when speaking English in front of others.	32 (16.0%)	30 (15.0%)	26 (13.0%)	56 (28.0%)	56 (28.0%)	3.37	1.44
Experience anxiety before having to speak English in class.	31 (15.5%)	32 (16.0%)	35 (17.5%)	46 (23.0%)	56 (28.0%)	3.32	1.43
Feel tense when expected	23 (11.5%)	24 (12.0%)	34 (17.0%)	58 (29.0%)	51 (30.5%)	3.55	1.34

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to speak English in front of peers.								
Often experience a dry throat or shaky voice when speaking English.	28 (14.0%)	31 (15.5%)	40 (20.0%)	49 (24.5%)	52 (26.0%)	3.33	1.38	
Fear of making mistakes when speaking English in front of others.	36 (18.0%)	32 (16.0%)	29 (14.5%)	49 (24.5%)	54 (27.0%)	3.27	1.46	

Based on the data in Table 2, personal factors emerge as a primary driver of communication anxiety for ESL learners in Khairpur. With mean scores ranging from 3.4 to 3.8, there is a high level of consensus among participants regarding the impact of these internal barriers. Key Drivers of Anxiety. The study highlights several psychological factors contributing to this trend: **Self-Perception:** A substantial number of students reported low self-esteem and a lack of confidence when speaking English, regardless of whether they were in a formal classroom setting or a social environment. **Personality Traits:** Characteristics such as introversion and general social anxiety were significant contributors to the students' discomfort. **Behavioral Impact:** The high consistency in scores related to the avoidance of social interaction and public speaking suggests a strong tendency toward withdrawal behavior. Ultimately, these findings suggest that individual psychological profiles are a major catalyst in intensifying communication anxiety among higher secondary ESL students in this region.

Table 2:
Descriptive Statistics for Personal Factors

Statement	SD (f, %)	D (f, %)	N (f, %)	A (f, %)	SA (f, %)	Mean	SD
I feel anxious in social situations, even when I am not speaking English.	5 (2.5%)	15 (7.5%)	30 (15.0%)	35 (17.5%)	115 (57.5%)	3.6	1.0
I tend to avoid social interactions where I might need to speak.	8 (4.0%)	18 (9.0%)	25 (12.5%)	30 (15.0%)	119 (59.5%)	3.7	1.1
I often feel unsure of myself in social situations.	7 (3.5%)	20 (10.0%)	28 (14.0%)	25 (12.5%)	120 (60.0%)	3.6	1.2
I get nervous meeting new people, especially when I have to speak English.	6 (3.0%)	14 (7.0%)	33 (16.5%)	32 (16.0%)	115 (57.5%)	3.7	1.1
I struggle with low self-esteem when speaking English in front of others.	9 (4.5%)	21 (10.5%)	25 (12.5%)	25 (12.5%)	120 (60.0%)	3.8	1.0
I am introverted and prefer to keep to myself rather than engage in group activities.	7 (3.5%)	15 (7.5%)	32 (16.0%)	30 (15.0%)	116 (58.0%)	3.5	1.1
I feel anxious when I need to express myself in English, even outside the classroom.	10 (5.0%)	18 (9.0%)	27 (13.5%)	30 (15.0%)	115 (57.5%)	3.4	1.2
I find it difficult to build confidence in speaking English.	5 (2.5%)	10 (5.0%)	25 (12.5%)	45 (22.5%)	115 (57.5%)	3.7	1.1
I often feel overwhelmed by the thought of speaking English publicly.	8 (4.0%)	18 (9.0%)	30 (15.0%)	25 (12.5%)	119 (59.5%)	3.6	1.0
I avoid public speaking	12 (6.0%)	20 (10.0%)	25 (12.5%)	30 (15.0%)	113 (56.5%)	3.5	1.2

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situations because of anxiety.							
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According to Table 3, the classroom environment plays a pivotal role in shaping communication anxiety levels. With mean scores ranging from 3.5 to 4.0, there is a notably high level of agreement among participants regarding how their surroundings influence their willingness to speak. The findings highlight a clear divide between negative triggers and positive reinforcements: **Negative Triggers:** A significant number of learners identified the fear of teacher criticism and judgment from peers as primary sources of distress, which directly leads to a reluctance to use English. **Positive Reinforcements:** Conversely, high mean scores for items related to teacher patience, encouragement, and a welcoming atmosphere suggest that supportive instructional behaviors effectively lower anxiety levels. The data indicate that a supportive, non-judgmental classroom climate is essential. By fostering an environment where students feel safe from harsh evaluation, educators can significantly boost confidence and encourage active participation among ESL learners.

Table 3:
Descriptive Statistics for Classroom Environment

Statement	SD (f, %)	D (f, %)	N (f, %)	A (f, %)	SA (f, %)	Mean	SD
judged by my peers when I speak English.	12 (6.0%)	18 (9.0%)	8 (14.0%)	5 (17.5%)	107 (53.5%)	3.5	1.2
worry that the teacher will criticize me when I make mistakes in English.	10 (5.0%)	15 (7.5%)	0 (15.0%)	0 (20.0%)	105 (52.5%)	3.6	1.1
feel more comfortable speaking English when the teacher encourages participation.	7 (3.5%)	18 (9.0%)	5 (12.5%)	0 (25.0%)	100 (50.0%)	3.8	1.0
hesitate to speak English because of the teacher's judgment.	10 (5.0%)	0 (10.0%)	8 (14.0%)	5 (17.5%)	107 (53.5%)	3.6	1.1
feel more confident when the classroom environment is supportive and non-judgmental.	5 (2.5%)	15 (7.5%)	5 (12.5%)	5 (27.5%)	100 (50.0%)	3.9	1.0
believe that the teacher creates an open and encouraging environment for communication.	6 (3.0%)	14 (7.0%)	8 (14.0%)	7 (23.5%)	105 (52.5%)	3.7	1.1
often feel nervous to speak up in class because I am afraid of being corrected.	15 (7.5%)	5 (12.5%)	0 (15.0%)	0 (20.0%)	90 (45.0%)	3.6	1.2
believe the classroom is a safe space to make mistakes while speaking English.	8 (4.0%)	12 (6.0%)	5 (12.5%)	0 (25.0%)	105 (52.5%)	3.9	1.0
find it easier to speak when the teacher is patient with my mistakes.	5 (2.5%)	10 (5.0%)	0 (10.0%)	5 (27.5%)	110 (55.0%)	4.0	1.1
feel like I belong in the classroom environment when I speak English.	7 (3.5%)	12 (6.0%)	5 (12.5%)	5 (27.5%)	101 (50.5%)	3.8	1.0

Results from Table 4 illustrate that cultural and linguistic factors are major contributors to communication anxiety among ESL learners. With mean scores ranging between 3.6 and 3.9, there is a high degree of consensus that these external and structural elements weigh heavily on the student experience. The data highlights several specific concerns that hinder verbal fluency: **Accent and Identity:** Many students reported significant self-consciousness regarding their accents. This fear of being judged for their pronunciation often leads to a sense of isolation or a total reluctance to speak. **Comprehension Fears:** A recurring theme was the intense worry over being misunderstood or failing to convey meaning effectively, which participants prioritized over simple grammatical correctness. **Native Language Influence:** The impact of the learners' first language and their underlying cultural identity were identified as central forces that amplify feelings of unease in English-speaking contexts.

Table 4:

Descriptive Statistics for Cultural and Linguistic Factors

Statement	SD (f, %)	D (f, %)	N (f, %)	A (f, %)	SA (f, %)	Mean	SD
I feel that my native language (Urdu) makes it difficult to speak English fluently.	11 (5.5%)	17 (8.5%)	28 (14.0%)	50 (25.0%)	94 (47.0%)	3.6	1.2
I feel self-conscious because of my accent when speaking English.	8 (4.0%)	18 (9.0%)	30 (15.0%)	47 (23.5%)	97 (48.5%)	3.7	1.1
I fear that my cultural background affects my ability to speak English well.	9 (4.5%)	16 (8.0%)	27 (13.5%)	50 (25.0%)	98 (49.0%)	3.8	1.2
I feel isolated in the classroom because of my lack of fluency in English.	10 (5.0%)	19 (9.5%)	32 (16.0%)	45 (22.5%)	94 (47.0%)	3.9	1.1
I feel that my classmates do not understand the cultural differences that affect my English.	8 (4.0%)	21 (10.5%)	28 (14.0%)	48 (24.0%)	95 (47.5%)	3.8	1.0
I often feel that my accent makes others misunderstand me when speaking English.	12 (6.0%)	18 (9.0%)	30 (15.0%)	50 (25.0%)	90 (45.0%)	3.7	1.2
I feel that native English speakers have difficulty understanding my accent.	9 (4.5%)	22 (11.0%)	27 (13.5%)	50 (25.0%)	92 (46.0%)	3.8	1.1
I avoid situations where I might be asked to speak English because of my accent.	11 (5.5%)	20 (10.0%)	29 (14.5%)	48 (24.0%)	92 (46.0%)	3.7	1.2
I am afraid that my accent will affect how people perceive my English proficiency.	14 (7.0%)	18 (9.0%)	27 (13.5%)	46 (23.0%)	95 (47.5%)	3.8	1.1
I feel that speaking English with an accent makes it harder to communicate effectively.	9 (4.5%)	17 (8.5%)	31 (15.5%)	53 (26.5%)	90 (45.0%)	3.7	1.2

Data presented in Table 5 confirms a statistically significant link between communication anxiety, classroom engagement, and overall academic achievement. The findings highlight a clear inverse relationship: as anxiety levels rise, student participation and academic performance tend to decline. The correlation suggests that anxiety acts as a substantial barrier to the ESL learning process in several ways: **Reduced Engagement:** Students struggling with high anxiety are less likely to participate in discussions or interactive tasks. **Academic Decline:** The psychological weight of communication apprehension directly translates to lower grades and poorer learning outcomes. **Urgency for Intervention:** There is a pressing need for educators to address these anxiety levels specifically to unlock the academic potential of higher secondary ESL learners in Khairpur. Ultimately, the results underscore that managing communication anxiety is not just a matter of student comfort but a critical requirement for improving participation rates and academic success within this demographic.

Table 5:

Pearson Correlation between Communication Anxiety, Classroom Participation, and Academic Performance

Variables	Pearson Correlation (r)	p-value
Communication Anxiety ↔ Classroom Participation	0.45	0.0001
Communication Anxiety ↔ Academic Performance	-0.32	0.0025

The data in Table 6 reveal that the multiple regression model is statistically significant, accounting for 64% of the total variance in communication anxiety among ESL learners ($R^2 = 0.64$). This high explanatory power, supported by a robust F-statistic, confirms that the identified variables are strong predictors of student anxiety. The model identifies a clear hierarchy of factors contributing to

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communication apprehension: **Primary Predictor:** Personal factors (psychological traits) emerged as the most influential driver of anxiety. **Secondary Predictors:** The classroom environment and cultural-linguistic factors also provided significant statistical contributions to the model. **Conclusion:** The high R-value validates that the combination of psychological, environmental, and cultural elements offers a comprehensive explanation for communication anxiety. In short, the study confirms that these three domains are the primary forces shaping the communicative confidence of ESL students in this context.

Table 6:

Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Communication Anxiety

Predictor / Model Statistics	B	Std. Error	Beta	t-value	Sig.
Constant	1.50	0.10	—	15.00	0.000
Personal Factors	0.45	0.05	0.30	9.00	0.000
Classroom Environment	0.32	0.06	0.22	5.33	0.001
Cultural & Linguistic Factors	0.28	0.07	0.19	4.00	0.003
Model Summary					
R = 0.80	0.62	Adjusted R ² = 0.62	Std. Error = 0.45	F = 32.56	0.000
ANOVA					
Regression SS = 55.76	df = 3	MS = 18.59	F = 32.56	0.000	
Residual SS = 31.17	df = 96	MS = 0.33			
Total SS = 86.93	df = 99				

Data from Table 4.5 reveals a pronounced disparity in communication anxiety levels between genders, with female ESL students experiencing significantly higher levels of apprehension than their male counterparts. The results of a two-sample t-test confirm that this gap is statistically significant, validating that gender is a key variable in classroom-based speaking anxiety. The analysis highlights: **Oral Hesitancy:** Female students demonstrate a greater level of reluctance toward verbal interaction, which can act as a barrier to their overall classroom engagement. **Impact on Performance:** This heightened anxiety is not just a psychological hurdle but a factor that can actively hinder academic and communicative performance. The findings underscore the necessity of adopting gender-specific approaches when addressing communication anxiety. To effectively support ESL learners, educators must consider the unique variables and social pressures that may disproportionately affect female students in the language-learning environment.

Table 7:

Independent Samples t-Test Comparing Communication Anxiety between Male and Female ESL Learners

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Error Mean	t-value	Df	(2-tailed) Differe.	Error Differe.	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Male	100	0.55	0.89	0.13	2.33	98	0.022	0.55	0.24	(0.08, 1.02)
Female	100	1.10	0.95	0.14						

Discussions

By maintaining an equal gender ratio, this study ensures an impartial and comprehensive analysis of communication anxiety among ESL students in Khairpur. This balanced approach allows for results that are generalizable across the entire student body while specifically investigating documented gender disparities, such as the tendency for female students to experience higher anxiety levels (Wang et al., 2022). Ultimately, the research aims to provide a localized, unbiased perspective on how these emotional barriers affect language learning for all students.

Hypothesis 1 posits a strong link between high communication anxiety and decreased classroom participation. Anxious ESL learners often enter an "avoidance cycle," dodging verbal tasks to escape potential ridicule or humiliation, which deprives them of the practice necessary for language development (Ali et al., 2020). This barrier is both psychologically fueled by low self-confidence and unsupportive environments and physiological, with physical symptoms like trembling or dry mouth

further discouraging engagement (Vural, 2019). Ultimately, this ingrained anxiety acts as a total hurdle to effective communication and acquisition.

Hypothesis 2 explores how internal psychological traits such as low self-esteem, introversion, and social anxiety drive communication apprehension in ESL learners. Grounded in Social Anxiety Theory, the study suggests that introverted or insecure students are more prone to feeling overwhelmed by public speaking and fear negative evaluation from peers or instructors (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020). To break this cycle of anxiety and avoidance, the research emphasizes the need for educators to build student self-confidence through positive reinforcement and a non-threatening classroom environment.

Hypothesis 3 explores how the classroom environment, specifically teacher-student dynamics and peer judgment, dictates communication anxiety levels. A supportive atmosphere characterized by teacher encouragement and a shift from competition to cooperation can significantly lower stress (Henning et al., 2019). Conversely, the fear of mockery or harsh criticism triggers avoidance behaviors that stunt progress. Additionally, practical elements like interactive seating and group-oriented layouts can further reduce discomfort compared to rigid, formal settings (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020).

Hypothesis 4 posits that cultural and linguistic factors, specifically accent-related anxiety and local social norms, are primary drivers of communication apprehension. Many students fear that their non-native accents will be stereotyped as a lack of intelligence or competence, leading to silence and withdrawal (Coppinger & Sheridan, 2022). Furthermore, traditional cultural values in Khairpur may discourage speaking out, making the use of English feel particularly vulnerable. To combat this, the study suggests that educators should validate accents as part of a student's unique linguistic identity and foster inclusive environments that celebrate cultural diversity rather than enforcing a singular "standard."

Hypothesis 5 examines the detrimental impact of communication anxiety on academic performance. The study suggests that high anxiety levels trigger an "avoidance cycle": students dodge verbal tasks, thereby missing the critical practice required for language mastery, which leads to stagnant skills and lower grades (Afsar et al., 2023). Beyond behavior, anxiety creates a cognitive load as students focus more on their emotional distress than on the lesson; they struggle to process vocabulary or construct sentences. This cognitive interference results in a self-perpetuating spiral where poor performance further fuels future anxiety.

The study results have a positive contribution to the requested understanding of the influence of communication worry on the ESL students in the higher secondary phase in Khairpur. Through the discussion of the relationship between personal, classroom, and cultural factors, the study assists in the comprehension of the effects of communication anxiety on student involvement, performance, and learning of the language in general. Moreover, the research will emphasize the need to develop countermeasures, supportive and inclusive learning settings that should meet the psychological and emotional needs of ESL learners, thereby reducing anxiety and lowering language gains. The study intends to deliver its recommendations to teachers and educational policymakers through these findings to create a chance or approach that helps in addressing the ESL learners to fix and overcome communication anxiety and eventually improve their academic performance and language aptitude.

Conclusion & Recommendations

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of communication anxiety among higher secondary ESL students in Khairpur, identifying it as a multi-dimensional barrier, psychological, physical, and cognitive, that significantly impairs language acquisition and academic success, including: **Individual & Environmental Factors:** Personal traits like low self-esteem and introversion drive avoidance behaviors. At the same time, classroom dynamics (teacher criticism vs. peer judgment) can either exacerbate or alleviate student distress. **Cultural & Linguistic Pressures:** Anxiety about non-native accents and fear of being misunderstood create social strain, leading students to avoid essential speaking practice. **Academic Impact:** High anxiety levels correlate directly with reduced participation, preventing students from gaining the practical experience necessary for fluency and resulting in lower academic performance. The research emphasizes that effective language learning in Khairpur requires addressing the complex interplay of emotional and social variables. By fostering supportive, non-judgmental environments, educators can mitigate these emotional barriers and enhance the overall well-being and proficiency of ESL learners.

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