

Detecting Perceived Barriers in FLSA: The Socio-Psycholinguistic Study of EFL University Learners

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ABSTRACT

Speaking is an essential and fundamental aspect of human Language. By acquiring and learning language, individuals can speak and converse with each other, transmit information and interact. However, in practical aspects, it is somehow, difficult for second and foreign language learners to practice English in their day-to-day life. Despite being competent in their relevant field, many people and professionals worldwide endeavor and struggle due to lack of good communication and speaking skill. Language disorders can be one of the hindrances for many people including EFL university learners. This study was guided by socio-cultural theory of Vygotsky, comprehensible input hypothesis of Krashen and foreign language anxiety theory of Horwitz. By adopting semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion technique, this study unveiled the psychological, cognitive and socio-cultural perceived hindrances that cause foreign or second language speaking anxiety in Pakistani EFL university learners. The participants of this study were recruited from public sector university in Lahore, Pakistan and were non-English majors (N=8) and aged between (20-26). The collected data was analyzed by employing content analysis technique. The findings indicated that speaking anxiety can originate from students' own self-perceptions related to thinking process, cognition and linguistic issues such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, unfamiliarity with topics, genre, psychological and affective factors like anxiety, anxious and introvert personality, low self-esteem, lack of confidence, pre-university language experience, time pressure, fear of negative evaluation, instructors' remarks; socio-cultural factors like lack of comprehensible input and exposure to TL, gender, and role of parents, geographical background, social status and were detected as speaking anxiety inducing factors. This study ventures to contribute to the existing literature on foreign language speaking anxiety among Pakistani EFL university learners. Thus, it can be practically implied from the above-mentioned factors that maximum exposure to English is of great importance and when learning process is mediated by more knowledgeable others and a person or a learner is scaffolded in the company of more knowledgeable others (parents or teachers) he gets the targeted results. Furthermore, friendly classroom environment can be very effective in overcoming speaking disorders and anxiety. The findings of this qualitative research have practical implications for second and foreign language EFL learning.

INTRODUCTION

One cannot deny the fact that language acquisition and learning is a way of socialization and two-way process and ultimately connects human beings from all walks of life. The importance of speaking language remains indisputable and thus, it keeps human beings closer to each other with same thoughts, needs, desires and goals. Individuals in society are connected as one race because of language. Many features of a society are dependent on language from formation of social groups and practices to beliefs and traditions. However, in

order to communicate well the mastery of speaking becomes the most significant aspect in language acquisition process as compared to other micro skills and huge number of people learn English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) to be a proficient user in speaking (Hamouda, 2020; Jabbarova, 2020). Thus, it is evident that the main objective of language acquisition is to be good and fluent speaker in SL or FL. Nevertheless, there are certain factors that do have a debilitating effect on speaking English and learners of FL/SL feel anxiety. Anxiety according to psychologists

and psycholinguists is a feeling of unease, restlessness and apprehension experienced by SL/FL learners in speaking with others and it affects the cognitive process of thinking and focusing (Abbas et al. 2020; Malik et al.2020; Shan, Hussain, & Sargani, 2020).

Neurobiological Aspect of Anxiety

Brain is the most intricate organ of human body as it performs various cognitive processes of thinking, speaking, laughing, feeling, caring and expressing love. However, the chief aim of human brain is to perceive, sense, store any information from the external and internal environment and act accordingly for the survival (Böttger & Költzsch, 2020). For this purpose, human brain has established an effective and rational bottom-up system. The lower regions such as brainstem and midbrain helps in maintaining and controlling the important functions like heart rate, respiration and maintains blood pressure (Böttger & Költzsch, 2020). Whereas the bottom-up areas like limbic and cortex performs complicated functions like cognitive thinking process and regulates sentiments and emotions. At early stages of childhood, the lower or the bottom region of the brain gets matured first and subsequently the adjacent areas of the brain. The human brain changes and develops as a result of present or past and good or bad experiences (Böttger & Költzsch, 2020; Perry & Marcellus, 1997; Phillips & Shonkoff, 2000).

Fear and anxiety cause detrimental effect on cognitive abilities and foreign language acquisition thus, affecting the process to think, concentrate, focus and also academic performance. Two nervous and neural process are related with anxiety and fear i.e., prefrontal cortex and amygdala. In simple words, amygdala is responsible for causing, maintaining and changing anxious feelings, anxiety and fear factor, it functions from least conscious part of the human brain and located in the limbic system (Böttger & Költzsch, 2020). On the other hand, prefrontal cortex is responsible for consciousness, memory, information, concentration, logical thinking and cognitive processing (Shaw et al. 2008). In all this developmental process of brain, age does play a significant role in both areas of human brain and prefrontal cortex is not entirely developed till the age between 20 to 25 and therefore, cannot utterly occupy and suppress sentiments

ad emotions like apprehension, fear and anxiety (Böttger & Költzsch, 2020) (Figure 1.1).

Statement of the Problem

Anxiety and fear is a complex phenomenon that is experienced not merely in early childhood rather in later years or in teenage to adulthood it does cause debilitating impact on human mind (Fondo, 2019; Tran, 2012). Many studies have investigated the debilitating effect of anxiety but the researcher take note that little has been done to address the perceived factors affecting spoken English as a foreign or second language among EFL university learners in Lahore, the second largest city and provincial capital of Pakistan. The current study attempts and aims to give an insight into various factors causing foreign or second language speaking anxiety which include psychological, cognitive and socio-cultural factors in Pakistani EFL university learners. This study will contribute in existing literature by giving meaning and understanding to EFL language acquisition in Pakistan in particular, and others in general so that the positive learning environment will be endorsed to overcome English speaking anxiety and learners can confidently speak and communicate in academic and social aspect. Based on the aims and objectives, this study sets out to answer the following questions:

Research Questions

- Q1. What are the perceived psychological barriers that cause foreign or second language speaking anxiety in Pakistani EFL university learners?
- Q2. What are cognitive and socio-cultural factors that induce anxiety in speaking English as a foreign or second language in Pakistani EFL university learners?

Theoretical Framework

This work is focused on three theories, namely, foreign language anxiety (FLA), second language acquisition (SLA) theory and socio-cultural theory (SCT).

The first framework is based on foreign language anxiety theory of E. K. Horwitz (2000) who defined anxiety as a

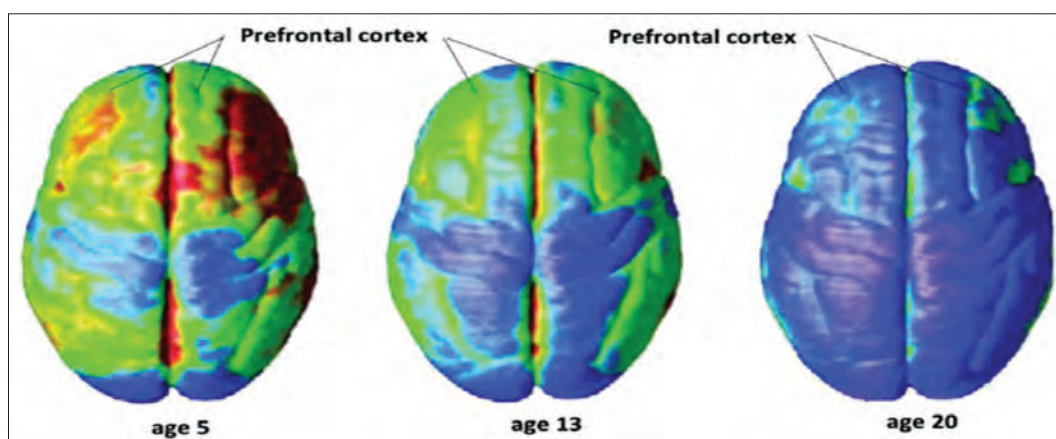


Figure 1.1. Development of the Cortex Functions (Source: Böttger & Költzsch, 2020)

psychological phenomenon of self-perceptions, emotions and feelings generating from acquisition of a foreign language. They testified and proved their theory by minutely observing foreign language learners during lectures, getting response and feedback from language learners. This theory proposed that other domains and disciplines do not cause same perceptions, self-beliefs and anxious feelings like foreign language learning which makes it distinctive anxiety from the rest of academic anxieties. Second or foreign language learners often have good performance in other subjects as compared to language learning. Many studies adopted this theory in different contexts and found it to be a unique type of anxiety that negatively affects students' speaking skills and academic performance (Malik, Qin, & Ahmed, 2020). This theory consists of three anxiety constructs that is communication apprehension or speaking anxiety which is a kind of nervousness or shyness while speaking and communication with other individuals. The second aspect is test anxiety which refers to apprehensive and anxiety feelings over academic examination and last is fear of negative evaluation that refers to the negative feelings or social anxiety caused by others' negative evaluation in social, personal or academic context.

The second framework is related to S. Krashen's (1992) comprehensible input and affective filter hypothesis. This theory is a fundamental theory in the domain of SLA. This proposed how affective filters are affiliated with the SLA process. According to Krashen (1982), affective factors are emotional factors or variables, which are 1) motivation 2) self-confidence and 3) anxiety. These emotional factors can indirectly affect second language learning process in the brain, if the language acquisition device (LAD) in brain cannot get enough comprehensible input. To be more specific, this theory sheds light on the relationship between emotional variables and success or failure of the second or foreign language learning or speaking. For instance, if the affective filters are high or increases, language learners may come across anxiety, apprehension, nervousness, low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence and therefore, these factors halt success. On the contrary to it, if the affective filters are low, that do not cause anxiety feelings which ultimately benefit learners in acquiring comprehensible input thus, making them learn and speak SL/FL confidently. The significance of this hypothesis in language acquisition is that the concept of affective filter presents the interlocutor in an innovative way, in which language teachers can effectively work on input and make it discernable for students in a low apprehensive situation and create a feasible environment in class. In simple words, language instructors can mitigate the learners' anxiety feelings by adopting certain strategies, by using and following this theory, English is hoped to be improved to a great extent as input will be increased and the affective filters will be reduced. In this theory, the comprehensible input means to get the adequate exposure to target language that is one step ahead of their current level of SL proficiency. In short, the main aim of Krashen's theory is maximum exposure to FL/SL/TL. By maximum exposure to English language along with low affective filters, one can gain and speak the second language successfully.

The third framework focuses on socio-cultural theory of (L. S. Vygotsky, 1978). This theory has a significant influence on language acquisition and teaching. There are many theories in second language domain and these are based on actual observation in language acquisition field. Chomsky's theory of universal grammar, B.F Skinner's theory of behaviorism, Krashen's theory of SLA and Vygotsky's theory of socio-cultural have brought fundamental change in language acquisition process and this was made possible because of keen observation and research in the child's language acquisition process. Therefore, the idea of Vygotsky holds special significance in SLA as he introduced the concept of language learning in social interaction and stresses on the social, cultural and historical perspective which is important in the child's cognitive development. The concept of this theory describes the development of the child when he or she works autonomously, but the significant difference is observed when he or she is encouraged or helped by the more knowledgeable other. It basically sheds light on the idea that the progress of the child is possible in the assistance and guidance of an instructor, parent or any friend or peer. Furthermore, the concept of zone of proximal development (ZPD) in this theory is described as the field of knowledge or skills where an individual or child is not capable of performing independently but can get the desired goals when he is provided with scaffolding. Another significant concept of this theory is mediation. According to L. Vygotsky (1978), mediation refers to the part played by other important and significant individuals in the learners' lives and providing more support to the novice. He says that the successful learning is possible due to the social interaction between two or more individuals with different levels of expertise, skills and knowledge depth and thus, learner adopts these mediation tools for his cognitive development and these mediation tools supports him to be more skilled gradually. Hence, another concept that is scaffolding in this theory is very important that means that assistance or help is provided to a learner for language acquisition and this help is stopped or diminished to make a child, person or a learner more autonomous or independent. Another aspect of this theory is internalization which means that the learners or a child is developed in the company of a parent, instructor or mentor in social plane and then he becomes independent. The last concept is private speech in this theory which according to him is the child's social interaction and ultimately it becomes inner speech towards the end.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Number of studies analyzed the factors generating speaking anxiety in learning foreign or second language and identified different aspects in this regard (Ahmad Al-Khotaba et al. 2020; Alghorbany & Hamzah, 2020; Asif et al. 2019; Ahmed, Pathan, & Khan, 2017; Badrasawi, Solihu, & Ahmad, 2020; Bashori et al. 2020). Factors such as physiological, cultural, linguistic, psychological may cause anxiety depending on the context and performance level (Kalra & Siribud, 2020). According to E. Horwitz (2001) during language acquisition process mother tongue may interfere and

induce speaking anxiety. Besides, students -related sources of anxiety there are some outer and external factors like lack of instructor’s encouragement and motivation and their negative remarks (Soomro et al., 2019a). Kayaoğlu & Sağlamel (2013) conducted interviews with 30 Turkish EFL learners and concluded that lack of linguistic competence is anxiety provoking. The anxiety of students also increases when there is improper teaching methodology, challenging tasks, time management and unfamiliar topics and content (Abbas et al. 2020; Zia & Sulan, 2015). Lack of confidence is also speaking anxiety inducing factor among students (McCroskey, 2015). Speaking anxiety may occur during Intercultural or interethnic communication or difference of cultures (Hussain & Shen, 2019a; Hussain & Shen, 2019b; Shan, Hussain, & Sargani, 2020). Few studies concluded that speech anxiety can be reduced with social interaction Noreen et al. (2019), collaboration and discussion (Donato, 2004; Swain, Brooks, & Tocalli-Beller, 2002). By employing Krashen’s comprehensible input and affective filter hypothesis, Gokcan’s and Cobanoglu Aktan’s (2018), study of 8th grade Turkish Students’ TEOG exams score, resulted if affective filters are low and there is maximum exposure to English language, then anxiety can be mitigated.

Coupled with the theoretical background supporting the significant role of Stephen Krashen’s SLA theory, Vygotsky’s SCT theory and FLA theory, this paper sheds light on the speaking anxiety inducing factors in Pakistani EFL university learners. This proposed study has pedagogical implications for policy makers, language educators and stake holders in Pakistani context. This paper is also valuable for EFL learners that will provide knowledge of the effects of communication and speaking anxiety and help them to overcome this issue. Based on the review of the literature and related theories, this study has proposed the following model for the analysis (Figure 2.1).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

The present study adopted qualitative research design for collecting data. Qualitative methodology is significantly dependent on the good techniques that are the consequence of explorative inquiry mode and findings (Creswell, 2003). The data was collected by conducting a focus group discussion and semi-structured interviews from EFL university learners of Pakistani university in Lahore. The previous studies adopted qualitative research technique and used semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion as data collection tools from instructors and students and investigated their perception about foreign language speaking anxiety (F. Asif, 2017; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2014; Tanveer, 2007). The selection of any specific kind of interview depends on the objectives of the research (Natow, 2020). In the present study, semi-structured interviews were conducted for certain reasons. Firstly, it permits the participants to dig deeply into their minds and to express their feelings and share experiences freely without any interruption from researcher. Secondly, being flexible in nature, semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to modify the wording of the questions where ever it was needed. Thirdly, semi-structured interviews are exploratory in nature as stated by Creswell & Báez (2020) and as a result, they provided enrich data for the current study and novel dimensions to the qualitative study which had not been explored earlier. Finally, in semi-structured interviews, the researcher does not impose his questions on interviewees as it is done in structured interviews (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The objective of using semi-structured interviews was to access the feelings, insights, thoughts and perceptions of the respondents about speaking anxiety which cannot be directly observed and measured. Thus, in this study, semi-structured interviews

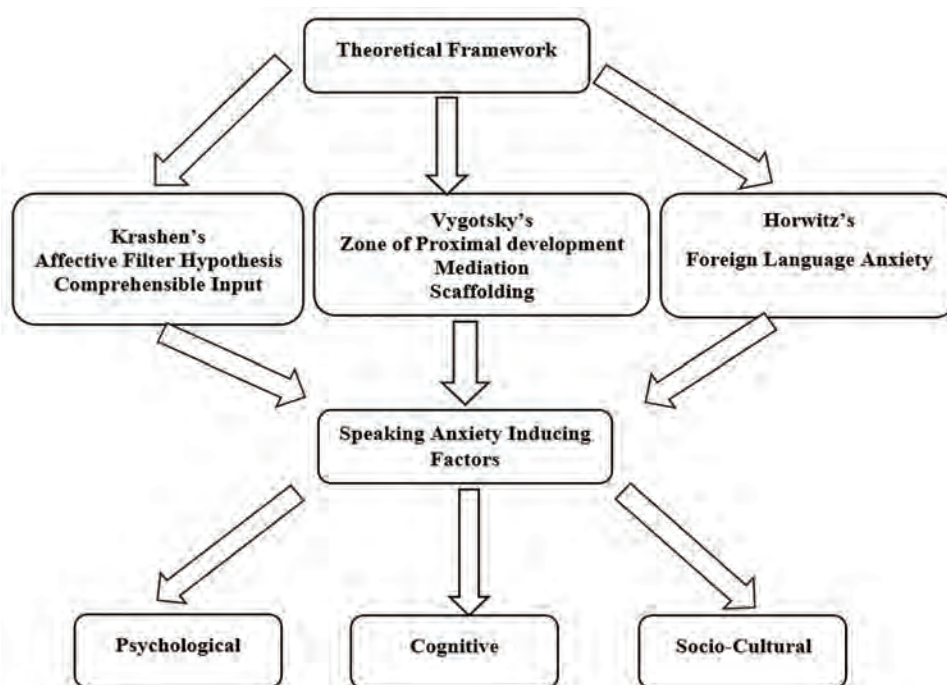


Figure 2.1. Theoretical Framework of Speaking Anxiety Inducing factors in Pakistani EFL University Learners

were conducted for qualitative data collection to get the better understanding of the speaking anxiety factors. However, the current study employed the above-mentioned interview format to investigate the foreign language speaking anxiety inducing factors merely from university students' perspectives. The significance of focus group discussion has also been pointed out in prior studies that this is deemed as a convenient way in which respondents easily unveil the information about phenomenon under discussion (I. Gopang et al. 2017). Due to certain constrains of time and space, researchers deemed semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion as the most appropriate and feasible method to conduct research. All the participants of focus group discussion and semi-structured interviews (N=8) were EFL university learners, non-English majors and aged between (20-26). The interview of each participant took 40-45 minutes. All the interviews were audio-taped by the researchers in order to avoid any data loss.

Data Analysis

Though there are some computer software statistical techniques that are employed for qualitative data analysis like NVivo. However, in the current study, the researcher analyzed the qualitative data manually for certain reasons. Firstly, qualitative data comprised of words, which may give allegorical meaning due to context bound (Mey & Mruck, 2020). Secondly, such qualitative statistical techniques are not capable of capturing problems and issues like anxiety, anger, nervousness, laughter, pauses or shyness, hesitation which are very important and essential and worth recording. Lastly, the manual analysis permitted involvement and immersion in data analysis, therefore, the interviewer was able to dig out new aspects and concepts. According to Talmy & Richards (2011), qualitative data analysis is a systematic procedure of separating research data into different parts or units. The researcher examines the various parts and then assemble the data in a meaningful way. In words of Creswell & Báez (2020), there is no mere single procedure which is the best for conducting qualitative analysis, rather there are different ways and approaches to analyze it in a systematic way. Qualitative data analysis procedure comprised of three phases such as data reduction, data demonstration and conclusion.

Data reduction consists of precisizing the data by reading many times and making list of codes. The next phase or data display demonstrates the data through charts, figures or tables, graphical images in an organized way. The last phase or conclusion means to deduce results and answer the research questions on the basis of several categories or sub-categories. The data was huge and not arranged, therefore, it was essential to reconstruct the assembled data to make the ambiguous and fuzzy data meaningful (Turner III, 2010).

Content analysis was used for semi-structured interviews. First the data was transcribed and then coding was done. A list of themes and sub-themes was generated in word document. The data was read repeatedly in order to get unexplored and hidden facts and factors (Creswell & Báez,

2020). The research questions were utilized as guideline on what to categorize and what to code. In doing so, certain themes were identified.

RESULTS

This section aims to investigate the causes and factors causing foreign language speaking anxiety among Pakistani EFL university learners. The semi-structured interview data identified the following three categories as sources that induced speaking anxiety in students of Pakistani university in Lahore.

Perceived Psychological Obstacles and Barriers

The following perceived psychological barriers were identified as sources of speaking anxiety among Pakistani EFL university learners.

Introversion and Anxious Personality

The finding of this study indicated that shyness and introversion are the predictors of speaking and classroom anxiety According to Pakistani interviewee:

"I am shy by nature and often willingly remain silent and when in lecture English speaking is required, I prefer to remain silent instead of participating and debating, I feel anxiety being in front of many class fellows. Sometimes, I prefer to sit behind". (6/8)

Another participant stated:

"At times, I feel too much low and disturbed even speaking Urdu in front of others and whole class...it's really hard for me to speak Infront of others and if it is English, I started sweating and shy". (6/8)

These findings are in line with some previous studies that anxious personality is a cause of apprehension and nervousness (Ahmed, Pathan, & Khan, 2017; Miskam & Saidalvi, 2019; Soomro et al. 2019).

Another Pakistani respondent said:

"After class, I try to go back home as soon as possible because of gathering and people around me feel anxious and I feel I don't like to be among many people". (6/8)

Personality traits and specifically introvert nature is considered as predictor of anxiety and apprehension. In the study of Olakitan's (2011), shy and introverts were more inclined to be silent and least interested in group discussion and hence, the finding of this study revealed that basically learners' avoidance is associated with their timid and introvert nature which also corresponds to the previous studies (Hanifa, 2018; I. Gopang et al. 2015; Tanveer, 2007; Wu, 2019). Some learners' anxious personality is also a cause of past failures and anxiety causing issue and they cannot forget it, and hence, sometimes anxiety could become the most prominent and dominant feature of such students' personality. This finding also supports the notion of trait anxiety as Spielberger (1983) affirms that trait anxiety is a general inclination to become apprehensive in many situations and hence, anxiety is a person's personality feature and people with trait anxiety often remain anxious in various situations.

Students' Pre-University Language Learning Experience

It was observed from the data analysis, that sometimes learners' previous or earlier negative experiences regarding speaking skills also cause anxiety. A great number of students enter an entirely new learning environment with their past language speaking and learning experiences (Bhatti & Memon, 2016; Gopang et al. 2017). According to Badrasawi, Solihu, & Ahmad (2020), learners' past experiences of oral or verbal communication may cause speaking anxiety, if they have an unpleasant L1 or L2 experiences which can affect their academic performance. An interviewee said:

"My English instructor used to speak impolitely, and that I still feel if I will speak in English, and an instructor gives unpleasant remarks, I feel nervousness and anxiety. I cannot speak confidently." (5/8)

This indicates that unpleasant past experience regarding L1 or L2 speaking may induce anxiety among university learners. This finding supports the previous empirical studies that anxiety and apprehension in students may stem due to number of reasons and instructor's remarks is one of them (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; Samad, 2014).

University EFL Learners' Beliefs

University students' self-belief was another speaking anxiety causing factor found to be under the theme of individual learner factors according to which some learners can associate unrealistic thoughts and beliefs to second or foreign language learning, speaking and these impractical practices could lead to frustrated feeling if not fulfilled. This finding is in line with past empirical studies (Ali et al. 2020; Perveen, Hasan, & Aleemi, 2018).

For instance, one of the participants said:

"I feel that I cannot speak English until or unless I do translation of those English sentences into Urdu in my mind, which help me to speak but sometimes semantic meaning is not understandable ... maybe I can never speak good English and confidently". (5/8)

Some students also had such beliefs like if they don't have certain abilities and capabilities like quickness of mind and sharp memory, they cannot speak good English. According to them some of their friends have special language learning aptitude and for speaking English it is mandatory, and therefore, one respondent said:

"I am lacking in language aptitude for speaking English unlike my friends, I can never do well in speaking". (6/8)

According to them, they wish, they could speak English as fluent as they speak their native language Urdu. Learners feel that they should speak flawlessly and such beliefs could make them perfectionist and subsequently get disappointed if fail to achieve such high standards. Samad's (2014) study had a similar conclusion.

Lack of Self-Confidence and Low Self-Esteem

Pakistani university students regarded lack of self-confidence and low self-esteem as speaking anxiety inducing factor during semi-structured interview one of the participants stated:

"The universities should start such activities and speaking courses in which special focus should be given to speaking skills. It's a pity many of us cannot speak confidently and feel anxious". (6/8)

Another participant said:

"environment is very important, but I feel the environment of our classroom is very formal and strict, there is fear of being laughed at if one speaks English with poor language skills or if some word is uttered wrongly during presentation, it affects confidence level. An instructor's role is very important, his encouragement, motivation can contribute a lot in building confidence. There should be some incentives or awards for students in order to motivate them and create such environment in which every student can confidently speak and participate in interactive sessions irrespective of the fact that his or her accent is average or he is she is fluent speaker of English or not". (7/8)

This finding suggests that low self-esteem and low confidence can be felt by a number of factors and instructor's motivational support is essential to boost confidence level in students. This finding is reaffirmed in the study by Ahmed et al. (2017).

Feeling of Being Observed and Negative Evaluation

The feeling of negatively evaluated by peers, friends and being observed as incompetent student by others was also identified as anxiety provoking factor in SL/FL speaking.

In words of a Pakistani interviewee:

"If I speak incorrectly, other fellows laughed and even out of class gave a smirking smile and make me realize as if I am incapable and inefficient as compared to them and it impacts my grades". (5/8)

Another participant said:

"I am an average student with regards to proficiency level and therefore, any of other class fellows think that I cannot assist them in any project and group discussion and those students who are proficient user and intelligent they always try to ignore me and literally do not like to talk with me and I also try to learn and improve myself further after listening negative remarks". (6/8)

Another interviewee stated:

"I cannot concentrate while giving a presentation, as soon as I feel that I am being judged, my confidence is shattered and my presentation becomes disordered, I forget words, that is reason, I prefer to sit silent and remain passive listener during lecture". (4/8)

This finding suggests that at one hand where students feel hesitant to listen such remarks in which they are being judged and evaluated negatively, they also agreed upon the fact that sometimes such negative remarks help to improve their performance because if one takes them positively and constructive criticism. This finding is in line with the seminal work of Samad (2014).

Time Pressure

The semi-structured interviews data of this study indicated that being granted short time either to respond to the instructor's

questions, or to communicate in general in second language in front of the classmates induced anxiety feelings for some students and caused psychological pressure and stress. This finding corresponds to few past studies (Hanifa 2018; Samad 2014).

According one Pakistani interviewee:

"I began to get nervous and panic when I realize I don't have adequate time to answer the target question, because I cannot formulate sentences without translating them into Urdu, but due to running out of time makes me frustrated and sweat and I feel and perceive that other students laugh and think I am not competent enough to answer. This is embarrassing". (6/8)

This finding corresponds to few past studies (Hanifa 2018; Samad 2014). This finding also supports MacIntyre's & Gardner's (1994) study who states that insufficient time does have debilitating impact on speaking L2.

Anxiety

The data analysis indicated anxiety as the most dominant factor in speaking or communicating with others among respondents. Anxiety which is considered a psychological factor and disciplines of psychology, Education, anthropology and linguistics share the common definition of anxiety as the subjective feeling of apprehension, edginess, fear and nervousness (Hussain & Shen, 2019). Since anxiety is related to the feelings therefore, also called an affective factor (E. Horwitz, 2001; S. Krashen, 1992). According to the respondent of this study:

"I feel speaking anxiety when the teacher's accent is native like and when others speak better than me, when I get less grades due to my poor linguistic knowledge, when the instructor points me out that I need to improve my language and speaking skills, when friends and class fellows say my accent is not good...this gives me stress and anxiety". (7/8)

This finding supports the previous studies (Javed et al. 2013; Tanveer, 2007)

Interlocutors

The interviews with Pakistani EFL university learners indicated that they do feel hesitation and anxiety due to authoritative interlocutors and their personal manner, their impolite and judgmental nature. According to an interviewee:

"Instructors are often authoritative and sometimes anxiety feeling occurs because of instructor's reaction and attitude towards learners in assessment reports, presentation and other tasks". (6/8)

Another participant said:

"Instructors can play an important role by encouraging and motivating their students as they act as role models for students and we do act upon their advices". (8/8)

This is in line with past studies that interlocutors' attitude and beliefs about language leaning and teaching methodologies are significantly correlated with speaking anxiety (Ahmed et al. 2017; E. Horwitz 2001; Young 1991).

Perceived Cognitive Factors (Thinking Process)

Cognitive and linguistic factors can also induce anxiety in speaking second or foreign language. In fact, cognitive

factors are related to learners' background knowledge as it affects learners' speaking and verbal skills.

Unfamiliar Topics

Some students definitely face issues in generating quick ideas if they are asked to talk about unacquainted topics about which they don't have knowledge or scanty information. According to one Pakistani interviewee:

"Some of the topics and captions of the assigned tasks are based on complicated proverbial sayings which is difficult to understand and answer instantly, such topics need to be prepared in advance in order to avoid speaking anxiety in English". (5/8)

Some of the previous studies also supported this finding that lack of topical knowledge is anxiety inducing and that discussion topics should correspond to the cognitive level of the students which are discernable (Hanifa 2018; Valencia Robles, 2017).

Genre

Another important cognitive factor is genre that should be given special attention. According to Hanifa (2018) and Thornbury (2012) there are several aspects and dimensions for various speaking events and for the sake of different speaking genres; are called transactional, interpersonal, interactive and non-interactive communication, planned and unplanned speaking. The university EFL students should have a clear-cut concept of the above-mentioned speaking genres as each of them has its own significance, features and levels of complication and difficulties. Speaking anxiety is influenced and affected by genre too. Some past studies indicates that EFL learners get nervous and anxious due to the insufficient knowledge and unfamiliarity with topic genre and when they are asked to perform verbal task publicly, like delivering a presentation or speech, they feel nervousness (Raja, 2017). This is anxiety provoking and affects students' performance, body gestures, verbal and nonverbal facial expressions too. In the words of Pakistani interviewee:

"I specifically feel high anxiety when I have to go at stage and there are lot of audience, I feel my heart is throbbing and I try not to look towards audience when I feel I am not able to deliver in a good way. This is difficult for me. I have stage fright". (6/8)

This finding suggests that EFL university learners favor interesting and familiar topics and genres that can be easily understood n speak without hesitation and this result mirrored the conclusions drawn by (Hanifa, 2018).

Grammar

There are some other factors too related to cognitive and linguistic aspect and that are the demands and stresses of learning and speaking a second or foreign language. For speaking and communicating in SL or FL a person needs to acquire knowledge and linguistic competence in certain aspects of language like grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation.

The Pakistani EFL university learners were of the view that certain cognitive processing demands also cause anxiety

and apprehension and their confidence is shattered if they are lacking grammatical knowledge (Asif et al. 2019). One of the participants stated:

“I feel desperate and disappointed when I cannot express my ideas due to lack of sufficient grammar knowledge, I get confuse if the tense is past or present, where to use the correct form according to the context, this is troublesome and aggravate speaking anxiety in me and the problem related to prepositions, various uses of articles, model verbs in English are really hard to remember and identify where exact form to be used and only practicing in speaking and writing can help”. (7/8)

This finding suggests that practice makes a person perfect and practice is desperately required for overcoming linguistic and cognitive factors that cause language anxiety. This finding is echoed with that of (Tanveer, 2007).

Vocabulary

The Lack of Vocabulary was found to be one of the anxiety provoking factor among the students as some participants said that in order to improve vocabulary we should do extensive reading on daily basis or at least do read newspaper daily one or two pages and listen some English TED talks to improve vocabulary (Asif et al. 2019). According to another participant:

“Lack of vocabulary gives me stress and anxiety, sometimes I forget even very simple words before presentation but nothing is impossible, we can improve it gradually and consistently by focusing on this aspect and developing reading habit can mitigate this problem, one can his or her vocabulary by watching English movies or series with subtitles in the beginning and read newspapers, it will gradually improve vocabulary”. (8/8)

This finding suggests that lack of linguistic and grammatical knowledge hindered them from articulating in SL or FL. This finding supports the previous studies (Asif et al. 2019; Wu, 2019).

Pronunciation and Proficiency Level

The analysis of the data revealed that incorrect pronunciation can be source of speaking anxiety in EFL learners. According to the participant:

“Pronunciation is an essential aspect in second or foreign language speaking because of its instant effect on interaction. Whenever I feel someone is not able to understand me, I try to improve my pronunciation by listening TED talks, English channels, listen YouTube videos, but it is stress causing if I mispronounce it”. (7/8)

Another interviewee said:

I think my English proficiency level is average but I wish I could become a proficient user; I try to speak and practice at home with my siblings and out of class with peers, sometimes, I feel too much anxiety and apprehension when I practice and focus too much on pronunciation and proficiency level, I become more anxious due to lack of confidence”. (5/8)

The learners, who suffer from lack of confidence and low self-esteem, experience linguistic difficulties often and end up in feeling of anxiety and apprehension (Badrasawi et al.

2020) In line with previous research, pronunciation and proficiency are also anxiety inducing factors for EFL students (Ahmed et al. 2017; Dar & Khan, 2014).

Perceived Socio-Cultural Factors

The last aspect of anxiety inducing factors related to foreign language speaking is socio-cultural and sub-themes of it. These themes are geographical background, lack of exposure to English, gender, social status, self-identity and role of parents were perceived to be anxiety causing factors.

Students' Geographic Background

The finding of this study showed that geographical and inadequate educational background is a major obstacle in speaking anxiety. some Pakistani students belong to rural areas where there is lack of sufficient educational facilities like medium of instruction is mostly Urdu in rural institutes or regional language is spoken. Lack of academic coaching and English-speaking classes, and lack of well-trained instructors does affect their performance. Unlike rural areas, urban areas and cities have good English medium schools, and universities where there are well trained instructors, classroom facilities and English language centers which offer various programs for students' language proficiency. In the words of Pakistani interviewee:

“I belong to rural area and I couldn't go to an English medium school in childhood, therefore when I entered into university for higher education, I felt like I am lacking in so many things as compared to my class fellows who belong to urban areas. They are good in speaking English, using vocabulary, and they feel confident due to their exposure to English right from the childhood, they don't feel anxious in speaking or giving presentations. I feel anxious when I have to prepare for presentation, my accent, vocabulary and less exposure to English give me uncomfortable and nervous feelings”. (4/8)

The finding is reaffirmed in the study by Samad (2014).

Lack of Exposure

The findings also indicated that some students due to lack of exposure to English language faced serious problems in the development of their speaking and communicative competence. The findings showed that the learners who had studied English at some Urdu-medium institutions perceived their English language base is weak and they lack in English speaking skills. As a result of this, they felt anxiety while speaking second English. According to Islam, Lamb, & Chambers (2013) English medium institutions polish and focus more on language skills better than Urdu-medium institutions in Pakistan.

One Pakistani student said:

“After getting into University life, I felt as If I am so poor in English that I cannot properly utter two, three sentences in English as my background education is entirely in mother tongue and I am weak in English speaking, it often causes anxiety feeling in me when I see my other fellows are

good at it...they speak fluently ... because they have good English-speaking background". (4/8)

Another student said:

"I do not feel any anxiety, I have been into English-medium school and studied English throughout till university life, I went to abroad with my parents and I felt more confident after visiting abroad, talking to native speakers and non-natives whose accent were closed to native speakers, in my free time I do use popular social apps like WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Telegram, use of social media really helps me in improving my English skills". (8/8)

The findings suggest that exposure to English language play a significant role in improving SL or FL and those students who were exposed to SL in country and out of country were more confident in speaking TL. This finding is in line with previous studies (Gökcan & Çobanoğlu Aktan, 2018; Yim, 2014).

Gender

The current study interview analysis revealed mix findings with regards to gender effect on foreign language speaking anxiety. Some past studies also shows conflicting results (Park & French, 2013). The learners seem to have different perspective and experiences of nervousness feeling or comfortable while communicating to the opposite gender. Some male respondents said:

"It was merely in the beginning, when they started studying in mixed-gender classroom that they felt bit anxious if they used to speak English. They spoke with great caution not to commit any mistake and feel embarrass in presence of female gender". (5/8)

Another female participant said:

"I rarely feel anxiety among my male class fellows. I do not hesitate to speak Infront of them no matter I am speaking wrong or right, I have been in co-education since the beginning I don't feel any anxiety". (6/8)

This finding suggests that gender related speaking anxiety experience varies from person to person and based on one's personal point of view and this supports the conclusion drawn by Samad (2014).

Social Status and Self-Identity

Learners' anticipation while talking or communicating to some individual higher in rank or status may induce anxiety and apprehension for them. According to Pakistani interviewee:

"Whenever, I meet my language instructor, I feel I am losing my confidence because his English is so perfect and I try not to commit any error in front of him and I try to speak as good as possible so he may not evaluate me negatively, I feel anxious in front of him". (6/8)

This shows lack of linguistic competence on one's part that may cause language anxiety. Additionally, it also suggests the intercultural communication anxiety due to unequal linguistic competencies of mother tongue and second language and also the one who is higher in rank might cause anxiety among speakers (Hussain & Ali, 2019).

The role of Parents and their Educational Status

In Pakistani culture, Parents play a significant role in their offspring's education since they are mostly dependent on their parents (Samad, 2014). The Findings of this study revealed that parental education status greatly impact students' language learning process too. In the words of one Pakistani participant:

"Since my parents' are well educated and have good English command, they always keep asking me and highlighting the importance of learning English language and speaking confidently... saying it can benefit me a lot in exceling in professional life and pursuing new opportunities." (8/8)

Another participant said:

"My parents couldn't send me to English medium school in childhood because they were not aware of the significance of English language, I belong to mediocre family and my parents are not well educated, so I feel that if my parents had sent me to some good English-speaking institution in my early education, I would not have faced difficulty in university life. It took me long to learn and speak even little bit English. I guess parental education status and their motivation towards learning an English language matters a lot". (8/8)

This finding suggests that parental education status, socio-economic background, their positive role and motivational attitude indeed have a great influence on their offspring's lives and educational career (Gökcan & Çobanoğlu Aktan, 2018; Samad, 2014).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this research correspond with previously conducted studies in various contexts. The findings of this research indicate that psycholinguistic, cognitive and socio-cultural factors as anxiety inducing factors in speaking SL or FL are perceived by Pakistani EFL university learners at public university in Lahore. The findings reveal that Pakistani EFL students feel psychological pressure and stress due to personality traits particularly those suffer from introvert nature and anxious personality, besides time management factor, negative evaluation by instructor, low self-esteem and confidence, pre-university education and language experience. These findings suggest that instructor's positive attitude, constructive classroom environment can reduce psychological stress and anxiety in students, they can participate confidently in overall discussion without the fear of being negatively observed, and their perception that their lack of English medium background is a hindrance in their oral performance. These findings from psychological perspective support the prior studies (Hashemi, 2011; Javed et al. 2013; Tanveer, 2007). The findings of this study also support the notion of foreign language anxiety theory of E. K. Horwitz (1986) that foreign language anxiety is a situation specific. In the second category, cognitive and linguistic factors, the findings indicate that students appear to be more anxious like they feel that due to lack of grammatical knowledge, vocabulary with poor accent and proficiency level, lack of topical knowledge and genre, they cannot perform well.

They are highly likely to be anxious when they get input which is above their capacity to respond. These findings are reaffirmed in the studies by Mouhoubi-Messadh (2017) and Soomro et al. (2019b). The third category is socio-cultural factors and Pakistani EFL university learners' focus group discussion and interview analysis reveal that students perceive lack of exposure to English, geographical background, gender, different social status and higher ranks, parental education status and socio-economic background factors as anxiety inducing variables. These findings mirrored the conclusions drawn by (Samad, 2014). The majority of the students in this study also agreed upon the fact that maximum exposure to English, use of social media, practicing speaking in and out of class and taking others' comments as constructive criticism can improve their speaking skills reduce anxiety and fear factor. The findings also suggest that instructors' supervision and parents' support and their educational status can play a significant role as mediators in students' cognitive and academic growth and according to L. Vygotsky (1978) learners' leaning process is mediated by more knowledgeable others and when a person or a learner is scaffolded in the company of more knowledgeable others he get the targeted results hence, this finding testifies the notion of mediation, zone of proximal development and scaffolding in this theory. In addition to it, the present study also confirms Krashen's (1981) views that if the learners 'self-confidence is high, he is motivated and maximum exposure to target language his anxiety is low, he can acquire language learning and speaking process in the best possible way but if affective filters are high, it leads towards anxiety and in presence of all these factors, students' academic performance is affected. Thus, the study recommends that significance and identification of these speaking anxiety causes needs to be delt seriously by language policy makers, instructors and educationists in order to assist Pakistani EFL university learners to make progress in their second and foreign language acquisition and speaking skills.

CONCLUSION

This study was aimed at investigating the psychological, cognitive and socio-cultural perceived barriers among Pakistani EFL university learners in a public sector university in Lahore. The focus group discussion and interview analysis revealed that Pakistani EFL university learners' major cause of feeling anxiety in speaking FL/SL was found to be the insufficient comprehensible input and lack of chances of practicing communication and speaking skill in the class and in social context (out of class) where TL is not used much like L1. Majority of the EFL learners reported that they know many vocabulary items, phrases and sentences but they do not come out right when required in certain communicative situation. This study concluded, that from psycholinguistics aspect, that when EFL learners' cognitive procedure of using a language (communication and speaking) are not regularized due to the inadequate practice either in the university and classroom or in the society or social context, these barriers are likely to continue causing problems and troubles for the TL leaners. Anxiety has

also been exacerbated by EFL university learners' feeling of low proficiency or lack of confidence in general linguistic knowledge which they often do not want to express or display. The respondents also perceived some other factors like geographical background, lack of comprehensible input and exposure to English and above all instructors' manner of error correction. To sum up, speaking anxiety, may not require any specific treatment but what it does require is the mindful and careful attitude of language educators and instructors in order to understand effectively and efficiently and tackle this complex phenomenon and problem in EFL learners.

LIMITATIONS

The sample of the subjects in current study was fairly small due to the time constraint. Therefore, the results related to speaking anxiety cannot be generalized to all Pakistani EFL university learners in public sector universities. Finally, it is recommended that future studies integrate quantitative research methods in order to get further information from a large sample.

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