

Anxiety Level of Students Pursuing Tertiary Level Studies in a Compulsory Second Language

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.805002>

Received: 28 March 2024; Revised: 13 April 2024; Accepted: 24 April 2024; Published: 27 May 2024

ABSTRACT

Foreign language learning anxiety is a very common phenomenon among students throughout the world. In Bangladesh, teaching and learning of a second language, namely, English is a major educational concern. Anxiety can have an adverse effect on students' achievement levels. The aim of this research was to investigate the range of situations that are responsible for arousing anxiety in learners while pursuing their tertiary studies in a compulsory foreign language (FL) which is English. Attempt was also made to examine the perceptions of these learners about how foreign language classroom anxiety can have a debilitating effect on their academic experience. The study was conducted through a mixed method approach on a group of students studying at a private university in Bangladesh through questionnaire surveys and focus group discussions (FGDs). Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz et al. (1986) was employed to conduct the survey. Data from the survey and FGDs were analysed using quantitative and qualitative measures. The data analysis has revealed that anxiety poses adverse effects on students' performance in classroom and exams at the tertiary level. The paper also offers pedagogical implications giving insights to the researchers and teachers in helping students overcome the obstacles which increase their anxiety. The study concludes with some possible suggestions that educators may consider dealing with students' anxiety in the foreign language (FL) dominated classrooms.

Keywords – Anxiety, FLCAS, Foreign Language (FL), Tertiary level.

INTRODUCTION

Anxiety is a multifaceted and complex emotion which involves beliefs, feelings, behaviour and self-perceptions and can be related to learning language in the classroom (Horwitz et al., 1986). Classroom anxiety during language learning is a major cause for anxiety in students and can debilitate students' achievement levels (Lalonde and Gardener, 1984; Horwitz et al., 1986). Anxiety is a distressful emotion which produces the same debilitating response as fear. This can be harmful to individuals if the state of anxiety is not reduced. Anxiety and fear are always deemed as emotions which can wield adverse effects on any human being in terms of both mental and physical health issues. The effects can cripple a human being's state of mind if steps are not taken quickly to locate the causes of that anxiety. If a human being is able to somehow deviate from the stimulus that is causing anxiety, he/she can get some reprieve from that anxiety. In order to be able to reduce the state of anxiety, the cause of anxiety has to be identified.

When conducted in an insightful manner, learning can prove to be highly exciting for students most of the time, especially at the tertiary level. Students at this level are found to be more anxious to perform well in their studies as the grades they achieve here significantly contribute to their success in professional life. However, it is not uncommon to find students hanging their heads in classrooms with lack of enthusiasm, stuttering profusely, intensely breathing while trying to ask a simple question or to respond to the simplest

queries from the teachers and other students. Oftentimes teachers have also found that even though the topic they are teaching in the class appears to be quite suitable to the cognitive level of the students, the latter can barely keep up with the lecture and lose concentration after a very short period of time. Researchers (Aida, 1994; Khajavy, 2016; Horwitz et al., 1986) have identified how affective factors such as anxiety and stress are highly responsible for impeding the progress of a student's learning. On that account, using a foreign language (FL) in the classrooms has been deemed as one of the foremost obstacles for students trying to attain proficiency in any particular discipline. While in BANA (Britain, Australasia and North America) contexts, learners scarcely face any difficulty in the classrooms as the medium of instructions used in the classrooms happens to be their first language. However, in the Asian context using an FL as the sole medium of instruction has caused difficulties for students who are not familiar with that particular language (Na, 2007).

In Bangladesh, a learner goes through twelve years of mandatory English instruction before entering tertiary level studies. Habib (2015) reports that in 2015 the pass rate of Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examinations has suffered quite profusely on account of students' poor performance in English as the pass rate fell down from 75.74% in 2014 to 65.84% in 2015. According to Siddiqui (2023), the percentages of GPA-5 obtainers have taken a hit due to the poor results in English. To illustrate, in 2023 English was the subject with the second lowest pass rate (90.83%) in Dhaka. Tajmim (2023) reports, "A comprehensive analysis of the HSC examination results paints a concerning picture, with the pass rate for English hitting a low at 82.73%." Seemingly these percentages are quite high, but in comparison with the other subjects, the percentage of pass in English is quite low. Even after prolonged exposure to English language classes, learners face anxiety. In the case of students studying in Bangladesh, learning English as a foreign language can be quite challenging. To elaborate, students who are from Bangla medium background hardly get any exposure to English except for English classes that solely focus on teaching English as a language. These students also get very little practice in sharpening their speaking and listening skills in English apart from just reading and writing, as the medium of instruction remains Bangla. English is only used in written exams specifically for the English subject. Even the students from English Medium backgrounds often struggle to master English. This scenario is somewhat different when a student enters a university for higher education. In Bangladesh, all public universities' students have the option of choosing their medium of education, it can be either English or Bangla. They have to study and pass only one compulsory course of English which is a foreign language to them in their first year of university. On the other hand, at all private universities, the medium of instruction is English and study has to be undertaken in English. Here in the first semester students have to pass two or three English fundamental courses and throughout the whole period of their tertiary education, their study, exams and assessments all take place in English.

At all private universities the medium of education is English. So whatever subject a student studies they have to use English as the medium of education. This becomes difficult as all students have to use a compulsory second language for pursuing their tertiary studies. This has led to many students suffering from extreme anxiety and lack of motivation as they are made to familiarise themselves with a language with which they share very little affinity. Davis (1987) states that anxiety can be caused by classical conditioning, so if the stimulus is removed the state of anxiety is not aroused. Individuals often resort to avoidance of the stimulus to reduce the state of anxiety. This anxiety might be divided into academic (e.g. errors in pronunciation, methods of testing, improper instruction of the FL teacher), cognitive (e.g. low self-esteem, shyness, fear of losing one's identity), and social (e.g. fear of being laughed at, competitiveness) (Khajavy, MacIntyre & Hariri, 2021). There has not been much research in Bangladesh to assess students' foreign language learning anxiety at the tertiary level. At the tertiary level, it is mandatory for every student to go through foundational courses that incorporate a wide spectrum of English language skills including reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Horwitz et al. (1986) identified three interrelated performance related anxieties. These are communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Firstly, communication apprehension alludes to the feeling of fear people experience when they are communicating

in front of other people (Park, 2014; Woodrow, 2006; Young, 1991). Secondly, test anxiety refers to fear which originates from the worry of failure in a particular test. Thirdly, negative evaluation is recognized as fear that results from students' apprehension of being evaluated or judged negatively by others. Students who recurrently experience anxiety may often deviate from using L2 as a form of interaction in the class with a view to escaping from negative judgements from their peers and teachers, which ultimately leads to a decrease in the oral efficiency in the L2 (Arnaiz & Guillén, 2012, Gregersen, 2007). As a result, these three intrinsically connected factors greatly impede students' L2 learning and achievements (Horwitz et al., 1986).

The objective of this study was to identify the anxiety level of students who are pursuing their tertiary studies in a compulsory second language which is English. This research can also assist teachers identify different scenarios that are likely to prompt three primary areas of anxiety: communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. The following research questions were formulated in order to fulfil the objectives of this study:

1. What are the primary causes of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) among tertiary level students?
2. What level of FLCA do tertiary level students experience when they pursue their studies in a compulsory foreign language?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between anxiety and foreign language learning has been studied from different perspectives since the 1970s (Casado & Dereshwisky, 2001). In recent times, a lot of research has been conducted to find out how affective variables such as anxiety, stress and motivation play a fundamental role in the learning and production of a particular language. Special focus has been given to identify foreign language anxiety (FLA) and identifying its colossal impact on how successful a certain learner is in his acquisition of a foreign language (Horwitz, 2001; Krashen, 1994; Pavlenko, 2013; Phillips, 1992), regardless which language teaching methodology has been implemented in this process (Liu and Chen, 2013). Horwitz et al. (1986) defined FLA as "a distinct complex construct of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of language learning process" (p. 128). They have upheld foreign language as a type of anxiety which is situation-specific that very well may depend on what sort of L2 contexts the learners are immersed in.

In a study conducted by Casado and Dereshwisky (2001), it was found that despite various advancements in teaching methodology, students still undergo a lot of predicaments trying to communicate in English in foreign language classrooms. The researchers used the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale designed by Horwitz et al. (1986) to identify the perceptions of first and second semester university students regarding English language learning. The study revealed that students experienced some level of anxiety for some aspects of foreign language learning. It was further revealed that as students moved from the first semester to the second, their anxiety level increased. The researchers concluded that this may be due to the increase of complex items in language learning.

Similarly, foreign language speaking anxiety was also found to be a common phenomenon by researchers Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009) in a secondary school in Greece. This was a classroom-based case study. Teachers are often not aware of anxious students and identify their unwillingness to speak English as lack of motivation. The aim of this research was to identify students' anxiety, give teachers suggestions so that they could help students reduce anxiety, and eventually increase students' English language acquisition and proficiency. Teachers identified that speaking activities in the class bred extreme anxiety in the students. Students did not participate in the speaking class as they were highly anxious of being negatively evaluated (Horwitz et al., 1986). The researchers tried to reduce the level of foreign language speaking anxiety

through various interventions consisting of project work designed to help students overcome their apprehension and anxiety. They finally suggested that if the teacher becomes a researcher, he/she can be the best tool to help students overcome their anxiety.

Na (2007) found that anxiety is correlated with English language learning achievement in Chinese high school students who already have 5-8 years of learning experience in English language study. The researcher examined the effects of anxiety on FL learning of high school students. At the end of the semester, a test was given to the students to assess their overall ability in language proficiency. The results of correlation analysis showed that students suffered from anxiety in regard to English test achievement. Students' feeling of anxiety arose from fear of negative evaluation and classroom atmosphere. Na (2007) concluded with the suggestion that teachers should consider the affective factors of students and avoid negative evaluation. However, Na (2007) suggested there should be some anxiety in students as research shows that adequate anxiety has a positive effect on students' learning and motivation.

In the same vein, a comparative study of Taiwanese and American university students was conducted by Duxbury and Tsai (2010) to find the level of foreign language anxiety among students and also to evaluate the effect of cooperative learning on foreign language anxiety levels. The study focused on students' foreign language anxiety levels and how certain factors in the learning environment, such as, students' personalities and background, learning styles, motivation and beliefs were connected to the foreign language anxiety. Since teachers are in a position of authority, they can impact these factors and establish cooperative learning groups (Slavin, 1991). Interesting finding of the study was that cooperative learning did not show any positive change in the American schools, but in the Taiwanese schools, there was a positive outcome. These results are contradictory to the literature which advocates cooperative learning as a measure to cope with foreign language anxiety (Dornyei, 1994; Oxford, 1997; Young, 1991). The researchers conclude that since cooperative learning was already an existing mode of learning in the US schools, it did not impact the students in any way whereas in the Taiwanese school, it was new and had a positive impact on the students' anxiety level. The positive correlation could be an indication of a debilitating anxiety.

Cubukcu (2007) investigated the relationship between anxiety and second language learning among Turkish university students. The students were interviewed and later asked to write down factors which induced anxiety in them in an FL classroom. Factors inducing anxiety in students were: speaking in front of the class, making mistakes, losing face, not being able to express oneself and fear of teachers. Peer approval and teacher support was also effective in reducing stress and anxiety. The researcher concluded that teachers must be made aware of students' state of anxiety which in turn affects their performance in a language class.

MacIntyre (1999) relates FLA to negative emotional reaction that surfaces during the process of learning or using a second language. This impaired emotional reaction could act as a major barrier to the production of a foreign language resulting in students experiencing extreme stress, fear and worry when they are attempting to master this language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). As a result, after a thorough investigation a significant number of research studies have come to the conclusion that there exists a negative correlation between a learner's achievement in L2 studies and FLA (Horwitz, 2001; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2000; Williams & Andrade, 2008). According to researchers such as Yang (2012), foreign language classrooms are often a by-product of an interactive classroom environment which ultimately leads to the development of anxiety within many students. Likewise, other researchers also support this claim as they suggest that despite the correlation between different language skills such as reading, writing, listening and speaking, the production of speech has been regarded undoubtedly as the major cause of anxiety and the reason for that is associated with the foreign language learner's apparent fear of communicating in an alien language in front of an audience without having complete proficiency in it (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Mak, 2011; Matsuda & Gobel, 2004). Aveni (2005) aligns learning a new language to redefining oneself as a person in public and also as a member of the society. Other authors also herald similar argument as they assert that the obstacles

learners encounter while attempting to master a target language may force them to re-evaluate their own perception of being efficient speakers that could lead to provoking a certain amount of stress and frustration in them (Cebberos, 2003; Schumann, 1978).

By pointing out the discrepancies that exist between beneficial/facilitating vs inhibitory/deliberating anxiety, some researchers have also suggested how FLA can prove to be conducive to language learning (Bailey, 1995; Dörnyei, 2005; Spielman & Radnofsky, 2001). However, a significant number of studies still highlighted how FLA could pose as a negative force on language learning (Cheng, Horwitz & Schallert, 1999; Horwitz, 2001). The harmful effects of FLA in a language learning context may give rise to the regularisation of behaviour incorporating avoidance such as arriving late in the classroom, lack of class participation and deliberately bunking regular classes. Moreover, FLA could also result in students experiencing negative bodily sensations such as excessive sweating and headaches and some of them also attempt to save face in the class through jokes (Gregersen, 2007). As a result, foreign language is heralded as a major issue in learning that poses a threat to the efficiency of language learning (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2000). Horwitz et al., (1986), being the proponents of FLA research, evaluated the level of anxiety provoked in a foreign language learner in a particular classroom by designing the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Because of FLCAS's capacity to maintain high reliability and validity, this scale has often been utilised in measuring students' anxiety in a wide spectrum of disciplines such as psychology, applied linguistics and education (Kruk, 2018; Mak, 2011; Park, 2014; Park & French, 2013).

Due to globalisation and the dominance of English as the most dominant international language across the globe, Bangladeshi students have had to accommodate themselves to English. In the private universities in Bangladesh, English has been prioritised above all, it is regarded as the primary mode of education and interaction in every classroom. It can be noted that very few studies have examined how foreign language anxiety has wielded harmful effects on language learning at the tertiary level across Bangladesh. Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap in the existing literature by exploring the influence FLA may have on the general academic performances of tertiary level students in Bangladesh.

METHOD

This study utilised a mixed method approach consisting of a survey and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Triangulation of data through quantitative and qualitative use of methods strengthened the data (Patton, 2014). The study took place at a private university in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh. Convenience sampling was adopted in choosing participants for the survey and FGDs.

A. Respondents

The participants were sixty undergraduate students studying at the undergraduate level in a private university. Thirty of these participants were from the school of Social Sciences and Humanities and the other thirty participants were from the School of Engineering. All students were from Bangla medium background but were at present pursuing their university studies in a compulsory second language which is English. For the purpose of this study the FL referred to is English. The participants were both male and female students ranging from 18 to 22 years of age. At the outset of the survey participants were all assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their reports and all ethical issues were observed (Robson, 2006). All these sixty students were asked to fill up the questionnaire and three groups of students comprising twelve took part in the FGDs.

B. Instruments

The scale used for conducting the survey was the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986). This instrument is widely used for investigating the anxiety level of

students about language learning. The reliability of the FLCAS has been confirmed by studies (Daly, 1991; Horwitz et al., 1986; Price, 1991; Young, 1991) which have investigated students’ anxiety about foreign language learning, specifically speaking and listening using this scale.

C. Procedures

The questionnaire administered to students was in two parts, in the first part there were some demographic questions. The demographic questions were given to keep record of participants’ age, educational background, medium of academic instruction and current educational status. In the second part, the participants had to respond to the questions of the FLCAS. The items of the questionnaire mainly test three major areas of anxiety, namely: communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. The FLCAS is a five-point Likert-type scale comprising 33-items with the responses ranging from a scale of 1 – 5, (i.e., 1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neither agree/nor disagree, 4=disagree and 5=strongly disagree).

D. Data Analysis

The responses that were collected from respective participants have been calculated in percentages and are presented in Table 1. All the percentages exhibited in the table allude to the number of students who agreed or strongly agreed; were neutral and disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statements regarding foreign language anxiety. All the percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

• **The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)**

The following table exhibits students’ responses to the FLCAS. The responses have been measured in percentages and fractions were converted to their nearest whole number. Table 1 depicts all the five degrees of responses. However, while analysing the data students’ positive responses (strongly agree and agree) to any survey items have been added and counted as one and negative responses (disagree and strongly disagree) have been calculated similarly.

TABLE I Anxiety Levels of Students Presented in Percentage

		SA	A	N	D	SD
1.	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.	6%	28%	43%	17%	6%
2.	I don’t worry about making mistakes in language class.	6%	28%	25%	30%	11%
3.	I tremble when I know that I am going to be called on in language class.	13%	37%	31%	12%	6%
4.	It frightens me when I don’t understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.	9%	23%	32%	25%	11%
5.	It wouldn’t bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.	10%	27%	25%	27%	6%
6.	During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course,	10%	12%	14%	29%	33%
7.	I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.	23%	25%	30%	19%	2%
8.	I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.	4%	31%	33%	23%	6%

9.	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.	19%	42%	19%	13%	4%
10.	I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.	10%	53%	22%	10%	4%
11.	I don't understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes.	19%	31%	31%	17%	2%
12.	In language class, I get so nervous I forget things I know.	17%	38%	23%	15%	6%
13.	It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.	13%	19%	36%	19%	11%
14.	I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.	13%	15%	36%	30%	6%
15.	I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.	11%	47%	23%	11%	8%
16.	Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.	20%	43%	12%	16%	8%
17.	I often feel like not going to my language class.	4%	11%	17%	34%	34%
18.	I feel confident when I speak in my foreign language class.	9%	32%	40%	17%	2%
19.	I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	19%	11%	30%	34%	6%
20.	I feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in my language class.	6%	45%	30%	9%	9%
21.	The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.	4%	28%	19%	30%	17%
22.	I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.	9%	38%	30%	19%	4%
23.	I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do.	13%	33%	37%	15%	2%
24.	I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.	15%	40%	30%	11%	4%
25.	Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.	10%	29%	25%	23%	12%
26.	I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.	8%	26%	25%	26%	13%
27.	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.	14%	37%	20%	25%	4%
28.	When I am on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed.	12%	21%	33%	27%	6%
29.	I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.	2%	56%	17%	19%	6%
30.	I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language.	17%	34%	34%	13%	2%
31.	I am afraid the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.	19%	33%	17%	19%	12%
32.	I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.	4%	26%	45%	19%	6%
33.	I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.	19%	50%	21%	8%	2%

Data collected through the questionnaires revealed that many of the students are afraid to communicate in a

FL classroom. These students validate FLCAS items indicative of speech anxiety. From the study, it is evident that a prime reason for communication apprehension is the feeling of deeply rooted self-consciousness, which commences from the primary and secondary levels of educational system and continues up to tertiary levels as they feel vulnerable when asked to speak in front of their respective teachers or peers in the class. For instance, more than half the participants claim, “I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class” (51%). Similar percentage of students can be found reporting “I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of the class” (55%); “I feel my heart pounding when I’m going to be called on in my language class” (51%); “In language class, I get so nervous I forget things I know” (55%).

In addition, it seems apparent from the responses of participants that lack of preparation before the class greatly invokes anxiety among the students as a large percentage of the students appear to agree with the statement “I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class” (61%). A lot of this panic seems to originate from students’ lack of urgency to take proper preparation before language classes, as they state, “I don’t feel pressure to prepare very well for language class” (47%). Moreover, it seems that even with proper preparation students cannot overcome anxiety as they state, “Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it” (63%). Also, most of the students’ responses reflect ambiguity when asked about their confidence in language classes as they assert “I feel confident when I speak in my foreign language class” (40% neutral).

Furthermore, not being able to understand the lesson being taught by the teachers in the classroom also contributes to communication apprehension. To illustrate, majority of the students have agreed to statements such as “I get upset when I don’t understand what the teacher is correcting” (58%); “I get nervous when I don’t understand every word the language teacher says” (58%). Also, students’ response to assertions like “It frightens me when I don’t understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language” seemed very indecisive as the percentage of agreement (32%), disagreement (36%) and neutrality (32%) is very alike.

Moreover, from our study, we have discovered that test-anxiety is another crucial factor that generates anxiety within students. For example, students highly approve of accounts such as “I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class” (63%). However, study has highlighted that when students adequately prepare well before tests held in the foreign language, they gradually become more confident as majority of the students deny declarations such as “The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get” (47%). In addition, students seemed a bit confused when asked about whether or not they feel comfortable when they are about to sit for a language test as they report “I am usually at ease during tests in my language class” (33% neutral).

In addition, from the study it can be discerned that negative evaluation or fear of being judged by the teachers and fellow classmates greatly promotes anxiety among learners. To elaborate, majority of the participants agree with statements such as “I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am” (48%); “Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind” (39%); “I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do” (46%); “I am afraid the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language” (52%). Also, the participants appeared to be a little confused when asked about their inclination to volunteer answers in their language class as in statements such as “It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class” (36% neutral).

In the same vein, many of the students who are apprehensive of being critically judged by their peers and teachers in the classroom, develop a reluctance to make any sort of mistake in the class which eventually restricts them from volunteering answers or responding to their teachers’ questions in the class or participating in group activities. To illustrate, the majority of the students reject statements such as “I don’t worry about making mistakes in language class” (41%). On the contrary, it seems that many of the students are not overtly anxious about being rectified by the teachers when they make an error in the class as

majority of the participants disagree with assertions like “I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make” (40%).

Also, from our study we have observed that even though many of our students suffer from anxiety in their language classes, some of them do enjoy language classes as well. For instance, students endorse statements such as “It wouldn’t bother me at all to take more foreign language classes” (37%); “I don’t understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes” (50%). However, many of the students also showed uncertainty regarding communication with a native speaker as they reported “I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.” (36% neutral).

• Data from FGDs

The following part is the analysis of the data received from FGDs of the participants. All FGDs were recorded, and data analysis took place through qualitative measures. The FGDs were fully transcribed and read to identify the three interrelated performance related anxieties — communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation). These performance factors were assigned codes, and the transcribed data were read several times to identify the recurring emergence of these factors. These interviews and FGDs proffer similar results to the studies done by various researchers in different parts of the world such as Greece, China, America, Taiwan, and so on. The performance factors that emerged from the data analysis in the context of Bangladeshi students pursuing tertiary level education in a foreign language, i.e., English, have been discussed below with quotes from transcriptions.

1) Communication Apprehension: English is mostly used as a communicative device, and naturally, L2 users would encounter various difficulties while communicating in it, especially in oral form. Since the majority of the participants in this study were first year students at the university level, and until this point, almost all of them had Bangla as their medium of instruction, it was particularly strenuous for them to adapt to this sudden change and do well in their studies simultaneously. While conducting the survey, one of the most frequent issues experienced by the L2 users was the lack of vocabulary, diction, and register during their conversations. Though they do not struggle equally while writing since the process of writing allows them some time to prepare before the transition from L1 to L2, speaking is a more active form of communication where these L2 users lack practice, confidence, and time.

In FGDs, when this issue was raised, the participants blamed education system of Bangladesh for this adverse attitude towards English. One of the participants in an FGD shared, “*English was always taught to us as a subject rather than a language.*” She believed if English was treated as a language in their secondary and higher secondary levels, they would not have feared it like other subjects. Another major issue that emerged during the discussions was the excessive focus on the grammatical rules in writing and reading activities while keeping the speaking and listening practice to the bare minimum, if any, in their primary and high school levels. As pointed by many of the participants, one of the primary reasons for this lack of proficiency in speaking and listening would be teachers’ reluctance or inability to follow the guidelines of NCTB prescribed books (e.g., *English for Today*) These textbooks offered a balanced learning experience in speaking, listening, reading and writing through adequate practice which was not realised. The participants felt that emphasis should be put on speaking and improvised dialogue practice from a very early stage of language learning. Additionally, teachers should disclose the practical implications of learning English outside their textbooks to young learners.

2) Fear of Negative Evaluation: In the survey, participants were asked if they had ever refrained themselves from responding in a classroom for fear of giving a wrong answer or being mocked because of their proficiency in English even though they knew the correct answer, and almost all of them had replied in the affirmative. This is also true when it comes to asking the teacher any questions. These responses prompted another query whether they had ever been ridiculed either by their peers or teachers when they

made such mistakes at the university level, and the answers were generally negative.

In FGDs, most of the participants expressed that they had developed the fear of communicating in an FL from their primary level, where they were teased by others for making the slightest mistake, and now it has evolved into anxiety when it comes to public speaking in English altogether. Since many students moved from rural areas to the capital, they noticed significant differences between their proficiency level in English and the learners already residing in Dhaka. This visible disparity had impeded even the enthusiastic learners of the former group from actively engaging in the classroom due to the fear of being judged or “insulted,” as one of the participants expressed. However, another participant shared his view on how to take the first step against this anxiety. He believed if one could gather enough courage to speak up once on their own, it would eventually become easier for them. *“One should try to answer the questions asked by the teacher regardless of being right or wrong,”* he added. But not everyone can or is willing to take the first step.

3) Test Anxiety: When it came to tests, the participants felt more anxious during the oral test, e.g., viva voce or presentation, than the written examination. One of them stated it is because in the written examination, they get more time to think before writing, which is not possible during an oral examination. Another student claimed, *“while we speak, we think in Bengali and then translate that into English. If we could think in English, then it would have been much easier for us to speak.”* Additionally, the matter of stage fright also came up during the discussions which has been elaborated below.

In FGDs, participants mostly talked about their fear of public speaking, and when it has to be in a foreign language, the anxiety becomes twice as much. The pressure of the grades associated with the oral presentation and the crippling fear of being laughed at even hinder the performance of a well-prepared presenter. However, all of them unanimously agreed that this practice of oral presentations should be introduced at a much earlier stage, and not at the tertiary level of education, for better outcome. They also expressed that some mock presentations conducted before the final examination could be helpful.

• Discussion

1) Lack of Exposure to English: The FGDs have revealed that most of the students in Bangladesh, especially those who are from the Bangla Medium background face difficulties while attempting to use English as a tool of communication at the tertiary level. A major cause of this seems to be the fact that the majority of these students have been accustomed to using Bangla as their medium of communication from their primary levels to their higher secondary levels. This scanty exposure to English deprives them of the ability to use English vocabulary and diction more proficiently. Consequently, when they enter their tertiary levels, suddenly a whole new set of vocabulary is thrust upon them. This sudden change breeds a great amount of anxiety within students as they face difficulty in understanding lectures or communicating in the class using the FL. Eventually, in terms of social effects, anxiety may reduce linguistic self-confidence in learners (anxious learners tend to underestimate their language skills) and diminish learners’ willingness to communicate in a FL (MacIntyre, 2017).

2) Lack of Emphasis on Speaking and Listening: Also, from the data it is evident that in Bangladesh, English is often treated less like a language to be used on a daily basis. As reported by one of the participants in the FGDs, from the primary to the higher secondary levels, English is viewed more like a subject rather than a communicative skill to be mastered. This leads to institutions assessing students’ proficiency levels based on their capacity to memorise grammar rules and vocabulary out of context and at times solving reading comprehensions. However, this deviates learner’s focus from mastering the listening and speaking skills which ultimately dictate a person’s capacity to use English as a language device.

3) Childhood Trauma: Furthermore, information gathered from the study shows that students feel vulnerable when they are asked to speak in classrooms due to their fear of being humiliated by classmates

or teachers. Moreover, the data highlights that students feel a great deal of apprehension whenever they respond to questions. The students did not experience any harsh treatment or criticism at their tertiary level; however, they were subjected to such treatment in their pre-tertiary education. It seems clear that this exposure to humiliation at such an early stage leaves a negative impression on their minds which ultimately transitions into a trauma. This trauma ultimately leads students to falsely expect teachers or their peers to tease or mock them for any mistakes made inside or outside the class.

4) Inadequate Preparation: The data and FGDs show that the majority of the students do not treat language courses very seriously. Hence, they often refrain from taking sufficient preparation before their language classes, which ultimately leads them to feel a significant amount of stress before speaking in the class. However, data has revealed that in many cases taking preparation may result in lessening the stress but it cannot totally diminish it.

5) Oral Tests: The FGDs have shown that oral tests such as viva voce or presentations evoke more anxiety in students than written tests. The core reason behind that seems to be the spontaneous nature of the oral form i.e., speaking. Students have to conduct the tasks of thinking and speaking simultaneously. In addition, it seems that the element of stage fright and fear of negative evaluation involved in oral tests leads to the fear of being mocked which decreases confidence in students.

In light of the aforementioned discussions, it can be suggested that teachers can lessen anxiety in students in a number of ways. Firstly, teachers can start focusing on students' proficiency in all the four basic skills of English at the earliest educational level (i.e., primary level) and steadily increase the input students receive in a gradual manner up to the higher secondary levels so that when they enter the tertiary level, their speaking and listening skills do not lack the grooming it needs to perform with confidence and efficiency. Secondly, as stated by one of the participants in the FGDs, English should be treated like more of a language so that students are eager to build up the habit of communicating in English both at home and outside. This will greatly diminish students' stress when they are asked to speak or respond in classrooms using English due to habit formation. Thirdly, teachers should be aware of certain situations that may leave a permanent scar on students' minds such as being laughed at or sneered at in the classrooms and take certain steps to make the classrooms more student-friendly.

CONCLUSION

This paper has investigated the reasons that are responsible for arousing anxiety among learners in a private university of Bangladesh pursuing tertiary studies in a compulsory foreign language. It has also examined insights and responses from learners on the effect of anxiety in their academic accomplishments. All data give a complete demonstration of the three interrelated performance related anxieties—communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Communication apprehension appears as a major source of anxiety for FL students who experience fear and peer pressure to speak in a monitored class. A crucial factor of students' anxiety comes from the fear of failing their language class and being judged by others. This inferiority complex generally comes from students' lack of FL use in primary and secondary level.

As for test anxiety, it hampers the grade significantly for some students who always feel that their peers have better FL proficiency. In the study, it is evident that the prime reasons for test anxiety are nervousness and confusion. In order to address this issue teachers, have to be more empathetic towards their students' needs, be more lenient and supportive.

A larger population could have given a better insight of various levels of students' anxiety. Research on a wider level is needed to determine the causes that are producing anxiety and barring students from

expressing their ideas clearly in the classroom and in examinations. It is hoped that the study could be a springboard for a new pathway for educationists to recognize different scenarios that stimulate FL anxiety in classrooms and be supportive of students to promote proficiency in a foreign language.

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