



## A Mixed-Method Study of the Types of Teacher-Student Interactions that Could Contribute to Pakistani EFL University Students' Foreign Language Anxiety

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### Abstract

Anxiety strongly affects students' language learning and some students may even abandon their studies due to anxiety (Toubot & Seng, 2018). Studies conducted in the Pakistani context consistently indicate that the majority of Pakistani students feel language anxiety (Malik et al., 2020; Marwan, 2016). On the other hand, Pakistani students have a big instrumental motivation to learn English because the acquisition of this language promises a bright career. Thus, it seems imperative to address students' anxiety in order to provide them with a comfortable classroom atmosphere so that they may learn English effectively and successfully. The literature shows that studies on anxiety conducted in varying contexts, target languages, and proficiency levels, consistently indicate that teachers can play a central role in the level of anxiety students experience in class. Although studies strongly report that teacher is a major source of students' anxiety, there seems to be a relative paucity of studies focusing on this source of anxiety specifically and in-depth. The current study aims to explore types of teacher-student interactions could contribute to Pakistani EFL university students' foreign language anxiety. The study utilised both quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (in-depth semi structured interviews and classroom observations) methods to collect the data. Postgraduate Pakistani non-English major students from five Pakistani public sector universities were recruited as participants. Sample for interviews consisted of 20 students while sample for questionnaire consisted of 170 students. The data suggested five sources of anxiety that can be associated with teacher-student interactions namely, strict teachers, teaching methodology, a formal classroom environment, concern about mistakes, and lack of student voice. Finally, implications of the study will be highlighted.

**Keywords:** Anxiety, Speaking-anxiety, Teacher-Student Interactions, Pakistan, Fear of negative Evaluation

### 1. Introduction

The literature throughout clearly indicates that anxiety is a serious and pervasive phenomenon in foreign language classes, which can interfere with the acquisition and production of language. Studies suggest that almost one third of the students in a language class experience anxiety (e.g. Horwitz, 2017; 2016, Malik et al., 2020, Milan, 2019). Anxiety strongly affects students' language learning and some students may even abandon their studies due to anxiety (Toubot & Seng, 2018). Studies conducted in the Pakistani context consistently indicate that the majority of Pakistani students feel language anxiety (such as Malik et al., 2020; Marwan, 2016). On the other hand, Pakistani students have a big instrumental motivation to learn English because the acquisition of this language promises a bright career. Thus, it seems imperative to address students' anxiety in order to provide them with a comfortable classroom atmosphere so that they may learn English effectively and successfully.

Studies have highlighted a number of factors, ranging from personal to interpersonal, that are responsible for students' anxiety. However, the literature shows that studies on anxiety conducted in varying contexts, target languages, and proficiency levels, consistently indicate that teachers can play a central role in the level of anxiety students experience in class. Although studies strongly report that teacher is a major source of students' anxiety, there seems to be a relative paucity of studies focusing on this source of anxiety specifically and in-depth. This reinforces the need to investigate this factor comprehensively and in-depth with the hope to help language teachers and students to understand this source of anxiety. It is noteworthy that this study could be particularly insightful in the Pakistani context where teacher is regarded as an authority, being formal and strict is considered important for a teacher, and classes are traditional (Ahmad, & Rao, 2013).

#### 1.1. Research Question

What types of teacher-student interactions could contribute to Pakistani EFL university students' foreign language anxiety?

### 2. Literature Review

#### 2.1. Anxiety

Anxiety can generally be regarded as an apprehension or nervousness about what may happen. It is a complex and multidimensional construct; thus, it can be defined from many aspects. For example, according to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, it is "the state of feeling nervous or worried that something bad is going to happen" (cited in Tóth, 2010:5). Similarly, Scovel (1978) views anxiety as an emotional state of "apprehension, a vague fear that is only directly associated with an object" (p. 134). However, Spielberger (1976, cited in Wang 2005:13) distinguishes anxiety from fear, which is usually derived from a "real, objective danger in the external environment", while the threatening stimulus of anxiety might not be real. Thus, Spielberger defined anxiety as, "the subjective feelings of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry that are experienced by an individual" (cited in Wang 2005:13). Similarly, Horwitz et al., (1986) define it as, "the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness,

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and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system" (p. 125). More recently, Hewitt (2011, cited in Yoon, 2012:1100) described anxiety by referring to its symptoms and accompanying lack of confidence:

An abnormal and overwhelming sense of apprehension and fear often marked by physiological signs (as sweating, tension, and increased pulse), by doubt concerning the reality and nature of the threat, and by self-doubt about one's capacity to cope with it.

As evidenced by the above definitions, anxiety seems to subsume some basic elements such as fear, worry, uneasiness and an unpleasant state which may debilitate the performance and abilities of an individual in a given situation. Its feelings may be attached to real or even to unreal objects.

### **2.2. Anxiety in Language Learning**

Studies have connected three types of anxiety namely trait, state and situation-specific to foreign language learning situations. Trait anxiety is considered an in-built anxiety and it is not experienced in a specific situation (MacIntyre, 1999). Moreover, an individual with high trait anxiety can experience stress more frequently than other people do, and he/she is likely to become anxious in any situation. It can have detrimental effects on the personality since, due to the frequent experience of anxiety, one may even perceive non-threatening situations as threatening. This approach cannot explain anxiety in term of language learning, since language acquisition is restricted to a specific context. State anxiety is experienced in a particular state or moment in time (MacIntyre, 1999). For example, a language student may be in a relaxed state but he/she can become anxious when asked to speak in front of the whole class or to take oral tests. Moreover, it can be argued that if the triggers of anxiety are removed (if students improve their language performance, for example) state anxiety levels may reduce. However, its frequent experience may turn into trait anxiety. However, this perspective of anxiety cannot explain language anxiety since subjects are not asked to assign anxiety to particular sources.

According to Horwitz & Young (1991) and MacIntyre (1999), the above two approaches assume that language anxiety is merely the transfer of other more general types of anxiety into foreign language learning. For instance, if a student experiences anxiety in certain situations, he/she would have a tendency to also feel nervous in the language classroom. However, the two approaches to language anxiety outlined above could not present a clear picture of how anxiety is related to the language learning context, as studies adopting these perspectives produced contradictory, inconsistent, and inconclusive results about the effects of FLA on language performance and achievement (Trang, 2012; Horwitz, 2010). This suggests the need to analyse anxiety specific to language learning. Thus, in contrast, it is believed that language learning situations produce a unique form of anxiety, and it is distinguishable from its other perspectives, as explained below. Horwitz et al. (1986) suggested that FLA should not be simply regarded as "fears transferred to foreign language learning" but rather conceptualised as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (Horwitz et al., 1986:128). Thus, they suggested that foreign language anxiety (FLA) should be identified as a conceptually distinct variable, well characterized by the uniqueness of dynamic features of language learning and using it in the classroom.

The concept of FLA as a unique type of anxiety specific to foreign language learning has been supported by many research studies which reviewed this theory and discussed the criticisms that have been levelled against it (for example, Trang, 2012; Zheng, 2008; and Cao, 2011). Moreover, this is a concept which has gained credence among FLA researchers; for example, in the words of Trang (2012:73), "Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's theory of foreign language anxiety has played a vital role in language anxiety research with a large number of studies using it as the theoretical framework". Similarly, according to Arnold (2007) and Tóth (2011), this theory has been used by many language anxiety studies across various contexts, including in Asia, and the studies have yielded meaningful and consistent results (e.g. Frantzen & Magnan, 2005; Aida, 1994; Trang et al., 2013; Huang & Hung, 2013; Matsuda & Gobel, 2004).

### **2.3. Teacher-Student Interaction**

The majority of anxiety studies highlight that anxiety is mainly connected with teacher-student interactions (e.g. Gregersen, 2005). It implies that differences between teacher's teaching style and learners' learning style may evoke anxiety for students.

A review of many studies reveals that teachers' harsh manner of correcting mistakes is one of the main contributors to SA (Pappamihel, 2002; Liu, 2007; Gregersen, 2005). Although students may experience SA due to error correction, others might feel frustrated due to the lack of error correction (Young, 1990). Students, therefore, may realise the importance of error correction but be concerned about the way this is done. As Young (1991) points out, the problem for students is "not necessarily error correction but the manner of error correction – when, how often, and most importantly, how errors are corrected" (p. 429). It could be argued that students may take error correction as a part of the language learning process as long as they are not belittled because of their mistakes.

In addition, the type of teacher is another cause of students' SA (Aida, 1994; Daubney, 2002; Lucas et al., 2011; Williams & Andrade, 2008). For example, Cutrone (2009) notes that teachers' negative demeanour may be one of the major contributors to SA. Palacios (1998, cited in Lim, 2004) noted the following teacher characteristics which can contribute to learner anxiety: unsupportive, unsympathetic personality, unfriendly behaviour, and lack of personal attention. Moreover, Von Worde (2003) reports that her subjects used various descriptors about teachers such as "very intimidating", "apathetic", "condescending", "very stern", "mean", "obnoxious", and "one who tries to scare students" (p. 3). Furthermore, Ewald (2007) believes that the unkind behaviour on the part of the teacher can aggravate SA. One of her interviewees states "I know I can speak well; it is just the professor that frightens me"

(p. 130). Additionally, “the teacher’s intolerance of silence” can also provoke SA for a student (Tsui, 1996:158). The student may not be able to give a quick reply to the teacher’s question as he/she might need time to process the answer. However, impatient teachers may ask the same question of other students, the student may perceive it as a failure and may feel frustrated. Similarly, teachers’ incomprehensible input and paying attention to certain students but ignoring others may also produce SA.

Moreover, there is the possibility of mismatches between instructional practices and students’ learning preferences; if the class is not taught the way students expected, they may feel tense and disappointed. Spielmann & Radnofsky (2001) in their study of American students of French found that students who were previously taught through GTM became frustrated when they were not taught grammar. It implies that even various SA reducing methods, such as a relaxed classroom environment and a sociable teacher, might not work if students’ learning preferences are not considered. It could be argued that students may experience SA in contexts, including Pakistan, where there is a lack of learner autonomy and their learning choices, needs and styles are not taken into account.

In summary, the studies indicate that students might experience SA when their teachers deal with them strictly and when their learning expectations are not met. The above studies seem to emphasise the need to investigate SA stemming from teachers’ teaching practices and personal characteristics.

### 3. Research Methodology

The current study utilised both quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (in-depth semi structured interviews and classroom observations) methods to collect the data. Relying on just quantitative or qualitative method would not have given a comprehensive and broader view of the topic. Thus, mixed methodology was used with the hope to get a comprehensive account of students’ language anxiety.

#### 3.1. Research Context and Research Sample

Postgraduate Pakistani non-English major students from five Pakistani public sector universities were recruited as participants. Sample for interviews consisted of 20 students while sample for questionnaire consisted of 170 students.

#### 3.2. Data Collection

Data collection procedure started with the administration of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was piloted before conducting the actual study. All of the ethical steps were taken into account such as students were informed that their participation is totally voluntary and also they were informed about the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. Questionnaire helped me collect large data in a short time. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Interviews allow the research participants to explain the reality according to their own understating. Moreover, interviews give participants a leeway to express their views, perceptions and beliefs about the topic. The interview guide comprised of a number of major questions and probes. Interviews were conducted in a comfortable and a non-threatening environment. Interview time with each interviewee ranged from 35 to 45 minutes. Finally, classroom observations were conducted. I observed twelve sessions from three universities. Observations allow the researcher to collect live data about students’ behaviour in the real context (Cohen et al., 2007). Through classroom observations, I came to know what actually happens in the real situation.

### 4. Data Analysis Procedures

SPSS was used to analyses the quantitative data while interviews and classroom observations were analysed qualitatively. In other words, quantitative data were analysed quantitatively while detailed content analysis was carried out for qualitative data.

#### 4.1. Research Findings and Discussion

The data to answer the research question were collected through the questionnaire, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and semi-structured classroom observations.

**Table 1 below presents the students’ responses to the questionnaire**

No	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I don’t worry about making mistakes when I am speaking in my English class.	4.1%	16.4%	8.8%	51.1%	19.4%
2	I can feel my heart pounding when I am going to be called on to speak in English class.	11.1%	40%	17.6%	24.7%	6.4%
3	It frightens me when I don’t understand what the teacher is saying in English.	4.1%	40.5%	23.5%	22.3%	9.4%
4	I prefer to speak voluntarily instead of being called on to speak in my English class.	20.5%	35.2%	16.4%	20%	7.6%
5	I get upset when I don’t understand what the teacher is correcting me on when I am speaking English.	10%	48.2%	17.6%	15.2%	8.8%
6	I feel anxious about speaking English in a large class.	20.5%	40%	8.8%	22.3%	8.2%
7	I feel uncomfortable speaking in class if the attitude of my English language teacher is strict.	26.4%	47%	7.6%	16.4%	2.3%

#### 4.2. Teacher-Student Interaction

This theme outlines five sources of Pakistani students' SA as found in the data, which will be analysed in turn: strict teachers, teaching methodology, a formal classroom environment, concern about mistakes, and lack of student voice.

#### 4.3. Strict Teachers

Many studies report that the teacher's personal manner directly influences students' anxiety levels (e.g. Ewald, 2007; Horwitz, 2001). For example, in her study with Spanish students Ewald (2007) concludes that her participants "pointed to the key role of the teacher in producing and relieving anxiety" (p. 122). It is apparent that teachers might be a significant source of anxiety since many important elements such as selecting teaching materials, managing the class and teaching, and addressing students' affective, cognitive and linguistic needs depend on them.

In this study the interviewees seemed to be unanimous in reporting that they feel tense and uncomfortable in the class of a teacher who is strict, authoritative, judgemental and unfriendly. This finding is supported by the students' responses to item 7 in Table 1 "I feel uncomfortable speaking in class if the attitude of my English language teacher is strict"; 73.4% of students either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement.

Kashif expressed his concern in his interview in the following quote:

*The fact is that I am not relaxed in the class because I know that the teacher is in front of me who is very strict. He shouts at us if we are a little late from the class and sometimes, does not let us enter ... we can't ask him to repeat the instructions about oral tasks. If we talk to each other in the class, he throws a pen or book at us.*

Tahir told the following story during his interview, which indicates how teachers' negative attitude towards their students can seriously affect them:

*... My friend abandoned the class due to the strict behaviour of the teacher. I think he got teacher phobia ... the same I am feeling ... sometimes, during my talk the teacher says to me, 'wrong wrong' very loudly. He seems all the time angry and serious.*

The following comment by Kashif shows the gap between the teachers and students in Pakistani classrooms, and indicates that such a teacher-student relationship may not facilitate learning speaking skills:

*Some teachers even don't want to shake hands with us as they consider themselves much superior to us. They will not talk to us outside the class as they think it is below their dignity. We have to call them 'sir' otherwise, they are unhappy.*

There seemed to be a lack of cordial and friendly relations between students and teachers in the classrooms observed during this research study. The attitude and the tone of two of the teachers were decidedly authoritative and reflected a sense of superiority. Moreover, the way teachers were addressing their students and the way they were responding reflected the perceived gap between them. For example, one teacher was asking students questions in an authoritative way but they were repeatedly saying 'gee' (Urdu word meaning, how may I help you sir?). In summary, the verbal and non-verbal cues of students indicated the SA they were experiencing due to their teachers.

In the Pakistani context, there could be various explanations for students' concern and worries about teachers' strict behaviour. Firstly, due to the traditional teaching model (i.e. teacher-centred classes) teachers themselves can create stress for their students. Secondly, some students' previous education and teachers may indeed be considered responsible for their SA at university level. This explanation is supported by Nabi's (1995) research conducted with Pakistani school students, which investigated students' views about their teachers and classrooms. One of the participants stated:

*He [the teacher] comes in the class with a stick, beats the stick on the table forcefully and says, 'keep quiet'. I do not understand why he threatens us by stick, by his language and by his facial expressions; honestly we do not know what we did wrong (Nabi, 1995:150).*

Nabi further commented that many of the study participants wanted to leave school due to the stressful environment. Schooldays can play an important role in shaping one's personality. Such behaviour on the part of the teacher can strongly affect students' self-confidence and self-esteem and its effects can be long-lasting. Therefore, some university students may be more susceptible to SA due to their past experiences. I would argue that the teacher's positive attitude towards students, language teaching, and the language classroom might be more important to students' learning than the actual teaching content and methodology.

#### 4.4. Teaching Methodology

Several comments made by participants pointed to teachers' teaching practices and methods. For example, Kashif said in his interview that he did not like the teacher whose "method of teaching is boring and he/she uses uninteresting materials". Javed added, "If my teacher does not pay attention to my talk, I lose confidence as I feel I am wrong ...". Students, therefore, may feel discouraged if the teacher does not pay attention to their performance. Likewise, Imran believed that the lack of encouragement from the teacher lessens his interest in the class.

Interviews further revealed that students may feel tense and anxious when they cannot understand their teacher. This finding is supported by item 3 in Table 1, "It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in English"; 44.6% of students endorsed this statement. Neelam's quote from her interview indicates that she cannot understand her teacher when the teacher speaks very quickly and this, in turn, influences Neelam's performance: "Sometimes, he [the teacher] speaks too fast; thus, I can't follow him. Then, it is hard for me to answer to his questions or participate confidently and actively in the class". Similarly, students may feel SA when they cannot understand their teachers' instructions, perhaps due to the lack of clarity or detail. As Fariha complained, "... the teacher doesn't explain the instructions clearly and in detail. Thus, I feel I will make mistakes".

GTM is still in practice in Pakistan. Some students reported in their interviews that their teacher focused more on

grammar and less on communicative activities to teach them speaking. Therefore, oral tasks produced difficulties for them due to their lack of practice in speaking. Noor clarified this, saying:

*The teacher is fond of teaching us speaking through grammar. But our target is to be able to communicate with other people ... our speaking is weak and that's why we find problems with it.*

Moreover, it was noticeable in some sessions of my classroom observations that the teachers were paying more attention to grammar than communication. One example is that a student went to the podium to give an oral presentation. In the course of his presentation, he made mistakes in the past tense. The teacher forgot about the student's presentation and explained the past tense for ten minutes. Although the student was making grammatical mistakes, he was speaking fairly well. This seems to indicate how much attention and importance teachers give to grammar and how they approach teaching the language in general.

#### 4.5. Forced Participation

The data collected for this study suggested that students feel uncomfortable when despite not being willing to participate in oral tasks, their teacher involves them all the same. According to Tóth (2010), this practice can make students afraid of the learning process. Likewise, Williams & Andrade (2008) note that "forcing the learners to respond before they are ready" creates SA for them (p. 187). This practice could encourage negative attitudes in students towards the language learning process.

Item 2 in table 1, "I can feel my heart pounding when I am going to be called on to speak in English class" was endorsed by 51.1% of students; correspondingly 55.7% of students endorsed item 4 in table 1, "I prefer to speak voluntarily instead of being called on to speak in my English class". Several students reported in their interviews that they felt uncomfortable when they did not know an answer, or were not ready to participate, but their teacher asked them to speak. As Adil stated:

*The problem is that the teacher knows that I am not ready or don't want to participate ... he/she doesn't care and says, 'OK, your turn, speak' you can imagine my condition. You know nothing and you are expected. Something doesn't happen and something happens ... I can't speak but I am ridiculed.*

Huma agreed that she wanted to speak when she knew the answer, otherwise she felt nervous:

*It is OK if I know the answer. I don't look at the teacher to show that I am not willing but usually he does not forgive me ... it is like you don't know and a stone can hit your head anytime. He says, 'get up and speak'.*

The classroom observations confirmed that mostly, except in a few cases, the teacher decided who will speak first, or next. Another common practice observed was that the teacher asked the first student on his right side to speak and then every student was supposed to participate, turn by turn. Although some students seemed excited when they were waiting for their turn, others appeared anxious. Von Worde (2003) also found that students' SA may escalate when their teacher calls on them in a predictable order and they wait for their turn to speak.

#### 4.6. A Formal Classroom Environment

The data revealed that a strict and formal classroom environment can frequently account for SA because it can encourage some of the key SA-provoking factors such as FMM, FNE, and fear of being laughed at. This finding is paralleled in a number of other studies (for example, Tóth, 2010; Crookall & Oxford, 1991). Aida (1994) reported that many students experienced anxiety when teachers created an atmosphere of terror in the class. In the current study, the interviewees confirmed that a "strict", "dry", "formal", "tense" and "judgemental" classroom environment produces considerable SA for them. Huma reported:

*Our classes are very formal ... the environment is very strict. Sometime, I feel I am in court and not in class. I try to be perfect as I feel self-conscious.*

This quote suggests that due to self-consciousness students may not take risks and part actively in class.

Similarly, students may feel more self-conscious and concerned about wrong answers, if there is no sense of community in class. For example, Adil explained, "We [students] are not like friends. I know some students who make fun of me in the class to disturb me. I wish they were not in class".

The findings from the interviews were confirmed by the classroom observations. Observational descriptions also indicate that the classes were strict and formal. Moreover, we have traditional classrooms in Pakistan where students sit in three or four rows and the teacher sits in his/her chair near the board. This seating arrangement seems to give the image of a formal classroom. It is rare to find a classroom where students sit in groups or circles.

In the Pakistani context, there could be a number of explanations for students' nervousness due to formal and strict classrooms. For example, according to Hussain (2004) and Shahbaz (2012), teachers are not well-paid in Pakistan. Therefore, most of them join this profession when they could not find other lucrative jobs such as in bureaucracy. This implies that they may not be entirely committed to this profession and additionally, that they might not be socially and economically satisfied. Therefore, they could be emotionally exhausted and such teachers tend to maintain a firm classroom environment (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

#### 4.7. Large Classrooms

In Pakistan, most university classes comprise not less than 40 students and sometimes this number exceeds 100 (Shamim & Tribble, 2005; Sarwar, 2008 [in her interview reported to Smith, 2008]). The present study's interview data suggested that large classrooms can also contribute to students' SA. This finding derives its support from students' responses to item 6 in Table 1, "I feel anxious about speaking English in a large class", where 60.5% of students endorsed this statement.

For example, Tahir reported in his interview:

*Our class is big. I think I could speak in front of a small number of people but not before too many people. Too many*

*people listen to me ... I can't face them.*

Similarly, Kashif stated:

*Also, another issue is our large class. I find it more difficult when I have to speak in front of too many students in class.*

During the classroom observations, I also noted that the classrooms were large. Furthermore, the physical condition of the classrooms was poor; for example they were congested and lacked proper ventilation, and the furniture was old. For instance, in one of my observation sessions, I noted that the teacher started the class and after a few moments the electricity cut out and we could not find it back till the end of the class. After the class, the teacher told me that electricity breakdowns are a routine matter. It is noteworthy that the classroom is the context where learning occurs; thus, physically and psychologically unsecure classrooms may affect students' language learning and speaking performance and make them uneasy.

Many Pakistani writers lament that English classrooms are large in Pakistan and that this factor affects the language learning process (e.g. Rahman, 2007; Shahbaz, 2012; Shamim & Tribble, 2005). For example, Sarwar, a Pakistani English teacher and researcher, laments in her interview reported to Smith (2008):

*I used to remember all their [students'] names, but then the numbers started growing, from about 40 to around 150. I started losing heart and even decided I would quit teaching (p.7).*

Similarly, large classes could have negative impacts on teachers' efficiency and behaviour. For example, teachers may not be able to transfer linguistic input effectively. One reason for large classes is an increase in the population in Pakistan. For this reason, the government should build more universities to reduce the number of students per class to facilitate better learning.

#### **4.8. Concern about Mistakes**

The data in this study revealed mistakes to be a source of students' SA. This is a source that has frequently been reported in SA studies (Gregersen, 2005; Liu, 2007). Some interviewees complained that their teachers corrected their mistakes and they did not give them enough time to let them correct themselves. In consequence, they felt upset and also their social image was damaged. The following comment by Tahir is indicative of the feelings of many other students:

*... If I am answering comfortably and I make any mistakes, the teacher quickly corrects me. He/she does not wait so that I can think and repeat the correct version. At this point, my worry and anxiousness starts as I really think I have failed and my peers will also think the same.*

Such a practice from the teacher may compel students to correct their mistakes quickly before their teacher does it for them; because, perhaps, they want to have a sense of achievement. But, unfortunately, they may confuse everything, probably due to the lack of proficiency. For example, Tahir further added, *"Next time whenever I make a mistake, I try to correct that as soon as possible but then I make more mistakes"*.

Item 5 in Table 1, "I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting me on when I am speaking English" was either strongly agreed or agreed by 58.2% of students. Similarly, several interviewees complained that their teacher interrupted them to correct their errors when they were speaking. This practice affected their concentration and made them uncomfortable. Furthermore, they remained unaware of their mistakes. The following statement made by Shabnam shows this concern:

*He [the teacher] disrupts my speech and corrects my mistakes or explains my point without asking me to hold on. And usually I don't have any idea where I made a mistake which he corrected. This affects my flow and ideas and then it gets hard for me to resume.*

Similarly, Tahir reported that these interruptions *"divert my attention"* and Adnan admitted that he forgets what he was saying. It is suggested that the teacher could correct students once the task or the sentence is over.

Item 1 in Table 1, "I don't worry about making mistakes when I am speaking in my English class" was rejected, strongly disagreed or disagreed with, by 70.5% of students. The interviews seemed to reveal that this fear of making mistakes might have negative effects on the students' learning because it can discourage their active participation and ultimately may influence their improvement. The following extract from the interview with Javed is revealing:

*Because of the possibility of making mistakes I do not raise my hand. Similarly, I don't ask questions where I might be wrong. The fear of making mistakes is always in my mind and it affects my confidence.*

This fear of making errors can have discouraging effects particularly when students are speaking. They may think about their answer and the possibility of being wrong simultaneously. In turn, they may get flustered and feel SA. For example, Noman reported:

*On one hand, I think about the material and ideas and on the other, that whether I am right or wrong. In this mental battle I do make mistakes; for example, about grammar or anything.*

It appears that the anxious students may develop the habit of paying more attention to the form rather than the content.

This fear regarding making mistakes could stem from or increase due to the fear of being laughed at. For example, Imran offered his thoughts: *"I am afraid of mistakes because they [other students] laugh at me"*. Similarly, Hashim did not want to speak and make mistakes as he did not like to be ridiculed and made fun of.

Several interviewees made comments about the harshness of the teacher's error correction. Adil indicates that students may be aware that mistakes are unavoidable; moreover, they might want to be corrected, but gently. He said, *"...Many students make mistakes but he [the teacher] corrects our mistakes harshly. I am more afraid of his manner of correction than making a mistake"*. In the same vein, Huma became anxious because *"if I am wrong the*

*teacher says 'you always waste time, you just stand up to say something wrong, remember it is not like that'".*

It was surprising that although Akbar stated that mistakes make him anxious, he suggested that students should not be afraid of mistakes as they are unavoidable when learning and speaking a foreign language. He said:

*Mistakes, of course, disturb us but I think we should admit that we will commit mistakes as learners. Therefore, we should not be much worried.*

A similar attitude was voiced by Ather: *"Sometimes, I say to myself 'you are a learner so you can't save yourself from mistakes' and I feel relaxed"*. It could be argued that if teachers help students have positive attitude towards mistakes, they may feel less FMM.

Classroom observation supported the findings of the other data collection instruments. It provided a chance to notice the students' discomfort stemming from mistakes. I saw how a single mistake made some students a laughing stock for other students, how the teacher discouraged students if they failed to answer correctly, and how students behaved and reacted after their mistakes. It was clear that mistakes made some students nervous and worried. For example, in one session, a student raised his hand to answer the teacher's question. In the course of his answer, he mispronounced the word 'echo' and other students, as well as the teacher, started laughing at him. Then, the teacher asked him to go ahead but he froze up and then he was asked to sit down. Some students kept on looking at him, his nervousness was apparent and he seemed lost; he did not raise his hand during the rest of the class, he was looking out of the window, resting his chin on his hand. It was obvious that he had lost his interest in the lesson. Moreover, he even tried to hide behind other students when the teacher asked questions again.

In another observation, a student confused the past tense with the present tense. He gave a nervous smile, realising that a mistake has been made. The teacher gave him a serious look and corrected him in an angry tone. He then reminded him that he is a university student and he is not supposed to make such minor mistakes. Another student also made some grammatical mistakes and he was asked to sit down. Other students were looking at him and his nervousness was obvious. Sometimes, he played with his hair or scratched his face. Although the teacher corrected the students, they might not have properly understood as they seemed anxious.

Gregersen (2003) claims that SA is cyclical; i.e. committing mistakes makes students anxious and the more nervous they are, the more mistakes they then make. Consequently, they may overestimate the seriousness of their mistakes and then often interpret their performance as being poor. Frost et al. (1995, cited in Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002) alleged that students who are over-concerned about mistakes: have low self-confidence, lament their mistakes to a greater degree, regret that they did not perform better in an oral task, and have an acute fear of negative evaluation (FNE). Such negative behaviours could eventually have debilitating effects on students' speaking performance.

Furthermore, it is important to note that there is evidence in the data that students may be afraid of making mistakes due to teachers' harsh way of correcting errors. Some students are able to respond to correction of their mistakes positively, and generally, students maintain that they want to be corrected in order to understand their mistakes. However, this must be done gently and prudently. It could be argued that although error correction can make some students anxious, not correcting mistakes can also frustrate others. However, the teacher has to be tactful when correcting students because this could in itself provoke SA, in spite of students' explicit desire to be corrected (Young, 1991).

The concept of fear of making mistakes (FMM) is perhaps one of the most reported reasons for speaking anxiety (SA) which highlights its strong interference with language learning. Jones (2004) reports that research, "both ethnographic and empirical, supports the notion that language anxiety, for untold numbers of learners, has its origin in the fear of making mistakes and attracting the derision of classmates" (p. 33). Similarly, Huang (2009) concludes that, "half of the participants in this study explicitly expressed a fear of making errors when speaking in class" (p. 255).

A number of reasons could be ascribed to students' fear about making mistakes (FMM). For example, students tend to make fun of each other's mistakes in Pakistani classrooms. According to Jones (2004), students do not want to commit mistakes due to, "a fear of appearing awkward, foolish and incompetent in the eyes of learners, peers or others" (p. 31). Moreover, in Pakistani culture, children are mostly dependent on their parents. Their parents often tell them what is right and what is wrong for them. In some cases, they are punished if they make mistakes. Such behaviour could develop FMM in some students. Finally, perfectionism, beliefs, and lack of proficiency may also produce FMM.

#### **4.9. Lack of Student Voice**

Pakistani academic institutions are still following a traditional teaching system in which the teacher is regarded as an authority. It emerged in the course of interviews that some students can feel upset when their voices are ignored. The following excerpt from Ather's interview seems to reveal this issue:

*... I feel bad because he [the teacher] does not ask our opinions about the exam, classroom, oral activities, and oral topics and if we say anything he does not give any importance to it.*

Similarly, the following comment by Hussain also reveals how students' choices and preferences are constrained:

*Some teachers don't like that we [students] should decide independently. I know a teacher who will change your group for the presentation if you didn't get his permission before joining that. I really feel unhappy ... we are Master's students and we should be free ...*

Lack of student voice can also cause frustration and SA for some students. This is a new and interesting finding and it appears that no previous study has reported lack of student voice as a possible source of students' SA. Some studies conducted in Pakistan reveal that students' views and opinions are not represented, i.e. students do not 'have



a voice' and that their teachers do not involve them in the teaching and learning process. For example, Nabi (1995) states, "students wanted more control of their learning" (p. 106) but the teachers were not always ready to encourage students' independent learning. Moreover, Inamullah et al. (2008), who observed 50 Pakistani English classrooms, reported that teachers mostly take decisions on *what* and *how* to teach and that more than two-thirds of the class time was taken up by the teacher. They further stated that the students studied seemed passive, bored, and disinterested. It is also possible that some students could be concerned about their proficiency and if their opinions are suppressed and their learning requirements are not addressed, they might want to get even more involved in the learning process. Similarly, there is a shortage of teachers and as previously noted, classes are large in Pakistan. Therefore, learner independence seems to suit Pakistani classrooms because teaching and learning might be easier and more effective if students become more independent learners.

## 5. Implications and Conclusion

Firstly, a big message of this study to language teachers is that foreign language anxiety is a strong phenomenon in language classrooms and it can seriously affect students' learning. Secondly, teachers may try to make language classroom a non-threatening place that encourages active participation and risk-taking and discourages various fears such as fear of being laughed at. Moreover, creating a social classroom environment creates a sense of community among students. Thirdly, teachers should not behave strictly with their students but rather present themselves as helpers and facilitators. Students would feel comfortable if their teacher is friendly and informal. Likewise, teachers should always encourage their students to boost their confidence. Fourthly, teachers may have a positive attitude towards their students' mistakes. They should ensure them that mistakes help improve learning. Likewise, the teachers should not correct every single mistake as this step discourages students from active participation in classroom activities. Furthermore, mistakes of students should be corrected in a gentle way.

The current study revealed that the 'student voice' is mostly ignored in Pakistani EFL classrooms. It is therefore recommended that teachers give students a chance to have their say about different aspects of the class, such as, teaching methodology and oral activities. Their involvement in the learning process could minimise their self-created fears about language-learning, particularly about speaking, and hence enhance their motivation.

In summary, it appears that most of the implications of the current study are inter-related and following one can influence the others accordingly. Creating an anxiety-free classroom for students, however, is often considerably harder in practice than in theory. It appears to be relatively difficult for successful language learning and teaching to be completely without any anxiety, as some anxiety could be inherent in the foreign language learning process. Nevertheless, it is recommended that teachers should be as sensitive as possible to students' SA. Equally students should be encouraged to learn more independently and consider ways and strategies in which to manage their own SA. It may be that they could benefit from acknowledging that learning and speaking a foreign language sometimes does involve some degree of anxiety. Similarly, they should not hide their SA but rather discuss it with their teachers or peers.

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