



## Analysis of English Students' Listening Anxiety during Classroom Learning at Higher Secondary Level in Karachi

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### Abstract

Anxiety plays a pivotal role in poor communication while language learning in general and listening Anxiety in specific is a major cause of poor listening comprehension. The study was designed with the purpose to assess the relation between listening anxiety and the performance of students in a listening comprehension classroom. The study used two investigation tools namely the listening comprehension test and the questionnaire based on various factors that could create or raise anxiety levels experienced by Science students at College Level. 100 Science College English students as subjects were selected for this study. The results show that there exist certain negative correlations both between English language Listening Anxiety and listening test scores. The factors that create anxiety the most are recognized as poor listening habits of students and lack of background knowledge. Based on findings, recommendations are also made.

**Keywords:** Foreign Language Anxiety, Listening Comprehension, English Language Learning

### 1. Introduction

Listening is one of the most important skills for learners of a foreign language but unfortunately, in the case of English language learning, listening and also speaking are the most problematic points for most English language learners. Several factors in Pakistan such as mother language influence, lack of resources available to teachers, and curriculum design to a greater extent, make foreign language learning and teaching process less effective and less productive. As a result, the learners feel Anxiety when they encounter English in a classroom environment as well as in practical life. Poor comprehending of English listening is also because of less emphasis on this skill by the society in general, wrong or orthodox teaching methodologies, poor and improper use of listening strategies by learners, and also students' lack of vocabulary. In the Pakistani system of education, listening skill is given the least importance while teaching of English language.

Based on the foregoing, the study has been designed to achieve the following objectives:

- To investigate the influence of English language anxiety on higher secondary school students during listening comprehension activities.
- To investigate the influences of classroom anxiety on students' listening test scores of English language.
- To identify the main factors that lead to listening anxiety of foreign language in the classroom.

### 2. Review of Literature

Feeling uneasy for example worry or fear is called Anxiety. It can be mild as well as severe like during or before exams, treatment of a disease or a job interview etc. Feeling anxious is perfectly natural unless worries become hard to control and affect performance. Anxiety becomes a problem when it is constant and overwhelming and starts interfering with a person's routine matters such as day-to-day functions, relations, and other such activities that need to be accomplished. This is like crossing the line between being normal and productive anxiety and entering into the Anxiety zone that is non-productive and problematic. In a condition of Anxiety, the person suffering from it can experience physical symptoms also like heart-pounding, upset stomach upset, headache or dizziness, sweating or urination, or even sometimes diarrhea as well. Other symptoms include shortness of breath, fatigue, muscle stiffness, eye or any other body part twitching. Anxiety may result in fatigue and insomnia.

During foreign language learning, anxiety is a hindrance to the successful performance of learners. Learners that suffer from Anxiety feel "tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry" resulting in activation of their automatic nervous system. Learners may find foreign language learning very stressful in the classroom. They try to avoid the class and postpone home assignments (HAFEEZ et al., 2023). Clinical experience specific to foreign language learners suggests that several problems were caused by anxiety and interfered with language learning in university classrooms. Counsellors found that anxiety is connected with two major skills of language learning: Listening skills and Speaking skills. Language learners who feel anxiety complain that they feel difficulties in distinguishing the sounds and structures in a message that is passed to them in the target. Some may experience hearing only buzzing sounds instead of what the teacher is speaking in a foreign language (Asghar et al., 2023). To completely understand the contents of the language text is also difficult for the learners and this situation is intensified while attempting tests. Students have reported that they forget during a test what they otherwise know, such as a thing related to grammar or spelling, due to being nervous and anxious and if a particular student realizes his/her anxiety during the test, he/she commits even more mistakes.

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FLCAS is the best tool so far that is commonly used to measure FL Anxiety, developed by (Horwitz et al., 1986). This tool has 33 items in form of a self-reporting questionnaire. The questionnaire is based on the Likert scale and it assesses various issues of ‘communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation.’ The questionnaire was developed concerning the ‘experiences of foreign language students’ especially those who were learning Spanish as a foreign language in the University of Texas at Austin (Young, 1992). All these students were willing to participate because of facing problems such as Anxiety or facing difficulties while learning the target language. This tool describes various situations which cause anxiety amongst students. In this way, FLCAS is considered a “situation-specific” tool for the measurement of Anxiety because in a foreign language context anxiety is mostly a result of particular situations (Golchi, 2012). This characteristic of anxiety helps researchers to measure it well so far as language learning is concerned. The researchers can identify and subsequently assess every cause and type of Anxiety (Lili, 2015). They can further divide students into various categories determining the levels of anxiety such as high, medium, and low, and then suggest measures accordingly. In this way, foreign language anxiety is determined in isolation from various other types of anxiety.

Anxiety is also a pivotal factor that results in poor listening comprehension as it is a result of stress learner experiences during learning a foreign language due to anticipated failure and lack of vocabulary specifically (Salehi & Marefat, 2014). Listening comprehension has always been found to be provoking Anxiety amongst language learners especially when they experience incomprehensible discourse (Sikandar et al., 2023). Several factors can cause the learners anxiety including their doubts about the listening text authenticity if the listening material is not comprehensible, and sometimes environmental and external reasons e.g. noise and distractions, etc. Lack of confidence, nature, and level of difficulties and speech and clarity problems also creates Anxiety apart from lack of repetition and visual support available (Al-Saraj, 2014). This fact has compelled researchers to focus on research in listening comprehension and they have concluded that it must be “respected in teaching and accounted for in research. (Hussain et al., 2022)” Researchers have found that Anxiety creates problems for learners to concentrate and their thinking is distracted. All this necessarily results in poor listening comprehension.

Listening by nature is a complex language skill. To be able to comprehend a foreign language, a learner must develop listening skills such as “aural comprehension” to be able to communicate effectively (Toth, 2010). In its very nature, listening skill provokes Anxiety in learners. Its problematic nature makes it difficult for teachers to teach it to the learners as well effectively. Learners of foreign language worry about misunderstanding or completely not understanding a listening text and also fear failures and subsequent embarrassment which may be the result of misunderstanding or failure (Trang, 2012). Listening Anxiety of College students in English classroom thus forms the base of this research study primarily to investigate the influence of various situations and problems that create Anxiety amongst English language learners and what are the consequences faced by these learners during classroom listening comprehension activities and what can be the possible techniques that can help in overcoming Anxiety (Khosro et al., 2024).

### 3. Methodology

The sample chosen to measure anxiety were the 100 first-year male students from a Higher Secondary School. All of them have gone through English language learning for maximum years of their school education. For this study, two instruments, a questionnaire, and a Listening Comprehension test were used to determine Anxiety and listening proficiency respectively. The subjects’ scores in the test are employed in the study in connection with their anxiety level. So, the questionnaire was used to measure their listening Anxiety level and the scores of the test were used to analyze their listening proficiency in English.

The questionnaire used to determine Listening Anxiety measured situations in which students may experience listening Anxiety. It had 40 items and 5-point Likert-type scales are used. It was divided into four parts with 10 questions in each. The questions were mainly related to various factors of Anxiety namely tension, confidence problems, issues regarding background knowledge, and improper listening habits of learners. The purpose of the questionnaire was to measure language Anxiety in general in the classroom environment. For every student, the score of anxiety was derived after summing up his scores for questionnaire items which concluded that a high score in the questionnaire represented a high level of anxiety faced by that student in the classroom.

**Table 1: Questionnaire**

Categories	Tension	Confidence Problems	Background Knowledge Issues	Poor Listening Habits
Items	Items 1 – 10	Items 11- 20	Items 20 – 30	Items 31-40

Listening Comprehension Test of English which was used to evaluate students’ proficiency in English language listening was designed in the multiple-choice format. It had 30 questions based on expected answers from the text and the logical thinking of the students.

**Hypothesis:** There is no correlation between the English language classroom listening anxiety and students’ performance in listening comprehension test scores.

#### 3.1. Data Collection

The data was collected through the questionnaire and listening test that was carried out at Science College. The instructions about filling in the questionnaire and attempting the test were explained in detail to the students.

They were first of all briefed about the purpose of the research. Then the listening tests and instructions were administered in the language lab. The participants were guaranteed that the results and personal information would not be disclosed. They were also guaranteed that their scores on listening comprehension tests have nothing to do with their final-term scores. 40 minutes were given to attempt the test and later after collecting the paper, the questionnaires were given to them. It took about 30 minutes to finish the questionnaires.

The mean of listening scores and the sum of Anxiety scores for each student were computed. The relationship of the two scores was tested by the Pearson Product Co-efficient correlation for correlation. To summarize the participants' background information and responses to the questionnaire, descriptive statistics (mean, SD, maximum, minimum, frequency distribution of the variables) were also computed for each item.

#### 4. Findings and Discussions

##### 4.1. Analysis of the Questionnaire and Listening Test

The questionnaire comprised of 40 items scored on a five-point scale with a theoretical range of 40 to 200. A higher score indicated a higher level of listening Anxiety and a lower score indicated a lower level of listening Anxiety. In this study, the total scores ranged from 89 to 168 with a mean of 126.00 and a standard deviation of 17.44. Based on a 5-point format, the mean score of 126.00 indicated an elevated level of listening Anxiety. The four categories of the questionnaire: tension and worry over English listening (Items 1-10), lack of confidence in English listening (Items 11-20) and insufficient prior knowledge (Items 21-30) and improper listening habits (Items 31-40) received different scores. The first category ranged from 21 to 48 with a mean of 31.92 and a standard deviation of 6.46. The mean scale score of this category was 3.06. The second category ranged from 15 to 43 with a mean of 28.70 and a standard deviation of 7.55. The mean scale score of this category was 2.88. The third category ranged from 23 to 42 with a mean of 31.98 and a standard deviation of 4.59. The mean scale score of this category was 3.24. The fourth category ranged from 16 to 42 with a mean of 33.40 and a standard deviation of 6.15. The mean scale score of this category was 3.31.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Questionnaire**

	Anxiety	Tension	Confidence	Knowledge	Habits
<b>Population (N)</b>	100	100	100	100	100
<b>Minimum</b>	89.00	21.00	15.00	23.00	16.00
<b>Maximum</b>	168.00	48.00	43.00	42.00	42.00
<b>Mean</b>	126.00	31.92	28.70	31.98	33.40
<b>Std. deviation</b>	16.98	6.46	7.55	4.59	6.15
<b>Std Error</b>	1.70	0.65	0.76	0.46	0.62

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Listening Comprehension Test**

Total Score	40 % and below	41-59 %	60-79 %	80 % and Above	Mean Score
30	35	16	38	11	16.52

The result showed Anxiety due to the third and fourth categories were almost equal. Anxiety due to lack of background knowledge and poor listening habits was more than the Anxiety caused by the tension and lack of confidence over listening comprehension of the English language.

##### 4.2. Anxiety Due to Tension and Worry

**Table 4: Listening Anxiety due to Tension and Worry**

S No	Item Description	%	Mean
1.	Audio/video comprehension difficulty	59.60	2.98
2.	worry about making mistakes	63.60	3.18
3.	Trembling when being called for participation	50.80	2.54
4.	Fright over not understanding the teacher	54.40	2.72
5.	Noise botheration	55.20	2.76
6.	Thinking about irrelevant things during class	77.60	3.88
7.	Thought of other students are better	62.40	3.12
8.	Unease during listening comprehension	64.80	3.24
9.	Panic to speak without preparation	58.40	2.92
10.	Worry about the consequences of failing	66.00	3.30
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>61.28</b>	<b>3.06</b>

Table 4 shows students get tensed due to consequences if failing ( $M = 3.30$ ) and feel unease during listening comprehension ( $M = 3.24$ ). They worry about making mistakes ( $M = 3.18$ ) and fail to concentrate because they think about other irrelevant things ( $M = 3.88$ ). Another reason for tension and worry that leads to listening Anxiety is thinking that other students are better at listening comprehension ( $M = 3.12$ ). Panic to speak without preparation and difficulty in comprehending audio/video aid is also cause Anxiety among them. All this leads to poor performance during listening comprehension.

### 4.3. Anxiety due to Lack of Confidence

**Table 5: Listening Anxiety due to Lack of Confidence**

S No	Item Description	%	Mean
11.	Upset and dislike foreign language classes and exam	45.60	2.28
12.	Get nervous and forget things	61.60	3.08
13.	Embarrassment in volunteering answers	54.80	2.74
14.	Nervous speaking with native speakers	61.20	3.06
15.	Nervous when the teacher asks spot questions	64.00	3.20
16.	Fear of other students while speaking.	55.20	2.76
17.	Feeling anxious despite preparation.	61.60	3.08
18.	The more study for a language test, the more confusion experienced.	55.60	2.78
19.	Heart pounding when going to be called on in language class.	58.00	2.9
20.	Uncomfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.	58.00	2.9
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>57.56</b>	<b>2.88</b>

Table 5 indicates that lack of confidence is also a major reason for anxiety in college students. (M = 2.88). However, being nervous for 'on spot questions,' (M=3.20) feeling anxious despite being prepared for language class (M=3.08), and being called by the teacher are the major reasons that create Anxiety (M=2.90) in students and indicate a lack of confidence in them. Students are uncomfortable with native speakers and don't feel good while talking to them (M=3.06).

### 4.4. Anxiety due to Lack of Background Knowledge

**Table 6: Anxiety due to Lack of Background Knowledge**

S No	Item Description	%	Mean
21.	Concepts of the listening test were new and felt a problem in understanding.	70.80	3.54
22.	Cannot tell whether someone has anything useful to say before he or she finishes communicating a message.	65.60	3.28
23.	Always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better.	62.80	3.14
24.	Do not like watching English TV channels, and listening to English radio channels.	65.60	3.28
25.	Language class moves so quickly worry about getting left behind.	63.20	3.16
26.	Feel more tense and nervous in language class than in other classes.	57.20	2.86
27.	Get nervous and confused when speaking in language class.	57.60	2.88
28.	Feel sure and relaxed when on way to language class.	65.60	3.28
29.	Find it difficult to understand listening texts when the topic is unfamiliar.	72.00	3.6
30.	Feel problem by the number of rules that are necessary to learn to speak/understand a foreign language.	66.80	3.34
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>64.72</b>	<b>3.24</b>

Table 6 indicates that Lack of background knowledge plays a pivotal role in creating Anxiety amongst students (M= 3.24). Students suffer severe Anxiety if the concept of listening to text is new to them and they are unable to infer the speaker. (M=3.28) They are relaxed on their way to language class (M=3.28) but by the time they take part in various activities, they feel confused and nervous, and also hard to keep pace with the listening activities going on. New topics and rules are always problematic (M=3.54) and they do not enjoy listening in forms of TV, movies, or radio. (M=3.28) the table also shows that students feel Anxiety due to unfamiliar texts, rules, and a fast pace of listening class. It can be summed up that lack of background knowledge may be due to rules, pace, or avoiding listening to the material on radio or TV creates Anxiety amongst students.

### Anxiety due to Poor Listening Habits

**Table 7: Anxiety due to Poor Listening Habits**

S No	Item Description	%	Mean
31.	Do not spend time listening in English to learn English Comprehension.	70.40	3.52
32.	Do not listen to songs, news and lectures in English.	67.20	3.36
33.	Do not like watching English Movies.	66.40	3.32
34.	Do not practice Listening in your spare time.	61.20	3.06
35.	Do not daily spend more than 15 minutes listening.	62.00	3.10
36.	Either take notes or close eyes to concentrate on listening.	68.40	3.42
37.	If the topic is unfamiliar, don't like listening to it.	62.80	3.14
38.	Get nervous and forget what listening to.	66.80	3.34
39.	Make up the content based on your understanding.	72.00	3.60
40.	Skip the part which doesn't understand and move on.	65.20	3.26
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>66.34</b>	<b>3.31</b>

Table 7, however, indicates that listening Anxiety is also due to poor listening habits of foreign language students which if changed or worked upon can lead to overcoming Anxiety in a much possible way. (M=3.31) The table indicates that students do not bother on listening to general texts (M=3.52) and spend some time in listening activities in their spare time. (M=3.36) This results in feeling nervous and confused during the

classroom activities and tests ( $M=3.34$ ) and they fail to concentrate on a listening text unless they take notes or try hard for concentration such as closing their eyes ( $M=3.42$ ). A maximum number of students does not spend even 15 minutes daily in their spare time may it be in form of a movie, a song, a lecture, or any other such activity ( $M=3.10$ ) which can make them familiar with the target language. Students also make up the content based on their understanding ( $M=3.60$ ) and skip information that they do not understand moving on with the rest of the information. ( $M=3.26$ ) As a result, students feel anxious when encountering a foreign language in any shape – be it a classroom activity or a real-life situation.

#### 4.5. Correlation between listening Anxiety and listening test score

**Table 8: Correlation (Independent Samples) for the Listening Comprehension Score and Anxiety Due to Tension and Worry**

Items	N	Mean	S.D	R	t value
Test	100	16.52	6.12	0.0914	*-17.3
Tension	100	31.92	6.46		

Level of significance  $* > 0.05$

The data in the above table 8 shows that the Listening Comprehension Score is positively correlated ( $r = 0.0914$ ) with Anxiety due to Lack of Confidence. Hence, the result shows that a raised level of Anxiety due to Tension and Worry will not necessarily affect the test scores of Listening Comprehension. However, it is to be noted that a positive correlation might have been observed because less tension and worry ( $M=2.88$ ) was observed as compared to other variables. Various factors that could create Anxiety due to tension and worry were not found in the classroom environments such as noise botheration ( $M=2.52$ ) or fright over not understanding the teacher. ( $M=2.72$ ) Students were not much afraid of the teacher being called for participation either. ( $M=2.76$ )

**Table 9: Correlation (Independent Samples) for the Listening Comprehension Score and Anxiety Due to Lack of Confidence**

Items	N	Mean	S.D	R	t value
Test	100	16.52	6.12	-0.0967	*-12.53
Confidence	100	28.70	7.55		

Level of significance  $* > 0.05$

The data in the above table 9 shows that the Listening Comprehension Score is negatively correlated ( $r = -0.0967$ ) with Anxiety due to Lack of Confidence. Hence, the result shows that a raised lack of confidence will affect the test scores of Listening Comprehension.

**Table 10: Correlation (Independent Samples) for the Listening Comprehension Score and Anxiety Due to Lack of Background Knowledge**

Items	N	Mean	S.D	R	t value
Test	100	16.52	6.12	-0.0344	*-20.19
Background knowledge	100	31.98	4.59		

Level of significance  $* > 0.05$

The data in above table 10 shows that the Listening Comprehension Score is negatively correlated ( $r = -0.0344$ ) with Anxiety due to Lack of Background Knowledge. Hence, the result shows that a raised lack of background knowledge will affect the test scores of Listening Comprehension.

**Table 11: Correlation (Independent Samples) for the Listening Comprehension Score and Anxiety Due to Poor Listening Habits**

Items	N	Mean	S.D	R	t value
Test	100	16.52	6.12	-0.1338	-19.45
Habits	100	37.81	6.15		

Level of significance  $* > 0.05$

The data in the above table 11 shows that the Listening Comprehension Score is negatively correlated ( $r = -0.0344$ ) with Poor Listening Habits. Hence, the result shows that poor listening habits will affect the test scores of Listening Comprehension.

**Table 12: Correlation (Independent Samples) for the Listening Comprehension Score and Listening Comprehension Anxiety Level**

Items	N	Mean	S.D	R	t value
Test	100	16.52	6.12	-0.066	*-60.64
Anxiety	100	126.00	16.98		

Level of significance  $* > 0.05$

The data in above table 12 shows that the Listening Comprehension Score is negatively correlated ( $r = -0.0344$ ) with Listening Comprehension Anxiety Level. Hence, the result shows that a raised level of listening Anxiety will negatively affect the test scores of Listening Comprehension. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

## 5. Conclusion

In this study, major problems identified for poor listening comprehension and listening Anxiety during classroom activities and listening comprehension tests were mostly related to poor listening habits and lack of background knowledge. However, Tension and Worry over listening also result in Anxiety. A raised level of

listening Anxiety ultimately affects students' activities in the classroom as a result of which their listening comprehension scores are not up to the mark.

## 6. Recommendations

The results of the questionnaire show that college students face Anxiety majorly because of their poor listening habits and lack of background knowledge. This demands that foreign language teachers need focus on strategies and techniques that make listening activities in the classroom interesting so that learners do not take listening and concentrating on classroom activities as tiresome jobs. An interesting classroom will help students to involve in listening activities to the maximum and thus reduce their level of Anxiety.

It would be appropriate if foreign language students in the very beginning are assessed by the teachers for their listening habits and background knowledge so that a clear picture of learners is held with the teacher and s/he can select listening techniques and strategies according to the level of the class. Students should also be informed about their present level of comprehension and underlying problems so that cooperation may be established between teachers and students to overcome Anxiety and make the listening comprehension process a success.

Teachers indeed can play a vital role in reducing students' level of Anxiety in the classroom and during exams also. The new concepts of listening may be introduced to the students before giving the exams. Learners may be taught key points that they need to focus on during listening. Useful techniques like inference, concentrating on tone, intonation, stress, and other concepts like these may be introduced to learners to make up their mind for difficulties they would face so that they are well versed with incoming difficulties and know how to deal with them.

On a personal level, students also need to start listening to the target language in their spare time. The learning process is boosted if deliberate efforts are put into it till the desired level of comprehension is achieved. Lack of exposure combined with poor listening habits ultimately makes the listening process difficult and results in listening Anxiety of classroom learning activities as well as results in low grades of students.

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