A Qualitative Study of Pakistani University EFL Teachers' Perceptions of their Students' Speaking-Anxiety and their Anxiety-Reducing Strategies in the Classroom

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Abstract
According to Arnold & Brown (1999), a student's, "anxiety is quite possibly the affective factor that most pervasively obstructs the learning process". In the same line, Zheng (2008) concluded that speaking in English class "can sometimes be a traumatic experience" for some students because of language anxiety. Studies have highlighted a number of sources of anxiety. However, the majority of anxiety studies report language teachers as a major contributor to their students' anxiety. Trang et al., (2013) reported that there might be discrepancies between students' and teachers' views about the role and effects of anxiety. Hence, it underscores the need to examine teachers' views about the role of anxiety in a language class. However, Ohata (2005) highlights that far too little attention has been paid to this topic. Alghothani (2010) stresses that since teachers play a vital role in affecting students' anxiety, their own awareness of students' anxiety together with teachers' views about its role should be examined. The present study aims to fill this gap by exploring Pakistani University EFL teachers' perceptions of their students' speaking-anxiety (SA) along with the strategies used by teachers to reduce it. The study employed semi-structured interviews to collect data from five universities in Pakistan. Interviews with 14 Pakistani EFL teachers were conducted. The data were analysed qualitatively following steps (data reduction, data display and conclusion) suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994). The findings indicate that most of the teachers were not fully aware of SA and its potentially debilitating effects on language learning. As a consequence, they did not take students' SA into account when they were teaching. Finally, implications and suggestions for teachers and educational/language policy-makers are discussed.
Keywords: Anxiety, Language Anxiety, Pakistan, Speaking Anxiety, Fear of Negative Evaluation

1. Introduction and Rationale

English is an international language. Therefore, English language learning is given a lot of importance in almost every country. In the same vein, English is regarded as a language of power and prestige in Pakistan and those who can speak this language are considered as cultured, educated and important (Shamim, 2011). Similarly, competency in this language helps secure better-paid jobs. Consequently, all stakeholders (e.g. parents, students) put a lot of time, energy and money to achieve its proficiency. However, despite many years of English education, university students can hardly communicate in English (e.g. Hafeez, 2004; Shamim & Tribble, 2005; Ahmad & Rao, 2013). Likewise, Shahbaz's (2012) study specifically highlighted English proficiency of many Pakistani students is poor. Malik et al., (2020) concluded that the majority of Pakistani students experience feelings of nervousness and uneasiness when asked to use this language in the classroom. One of the reasons for Pakistani students' poor language learning and their feelings of nervousness in the class could be foreign language anxiety. In the words of Arnold & Brown (1999), an individual's, "anxiety is quite possibly the affective factor that most pervasively obstructs the learning process". A number of researchers (such as Zheng, 2008; Horwitz, 2013) believe that almost half of the language class experience anxiety.

Studies have highlighted a number of sources of anxiety. However, the majority of anxiety studies agree that language teachers are one of the major contributors to students' anxiety (Trang et al., (2013). Pakistani students might also experience anxiety since in Pakistan, traditional teaching system is in practice where teacher is regarded as an authority. Studies such as Alghothani (2010) suggested that students' and teachers' perceptions about the role of language anxiety could be different. There might be discrepancies between students' and teachers' views about the role and severity of anxiety. Moreover, many language teachers may lack knowledge of the effects of anxiety on language learning. Hence, it underscores the need to examine teachers' views of the role of anxiety in the language class; however, far too little attention has been paid to this topic (Ohata, 2005).

Some anxiety researchers have recommended that this topic should be investigated (e.g. Alghothani, 2010). Alghothani (2010) stresses that since teachers play a vital role in affecting students' anxiety, their own awareness of students' anxiety together with teachers' views about its role should be examined. The present study aims to fill this gap by exploring Pakistani EFL teachers' perceptions of their students' speaking-anxiety (SA) along with the strategies used by teachers to reduce it. It also noted gaps between teachers' and students' perceptions and understanding of the role of anxiety in the class. On the other hand, as noted above, studies report that teachers can strongly affect students' anxiety levels; therefore, it seems important that teachers may have adequate knowledge of anxiety and of its ramifications for language learning.

1.1. Research Question

What are Pakistani EFL university teachers' perceptions of their students' foreign language speaking anxiety and what are the teachers' current strategies to reduce it?

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1.2. Significance of the Study

Due to a lack of general awareness of SA, teachers might attribute their students' reluctance when asked to speak or their poor oral performance to various other factors such as lack of motivation, interest, and ability (Gregersen, 2003). Similarly, teachers may unintentionally produce or increase students' SA by incorporating anxiety-provoking oral activities and materials. This study has the potential to advise Pakistani EFL teachers that some of their students may not be able to perform in the class due to SA, and it may serve to inform teachers about the sources of this anxiety. Moreover, this study may offer implications for curricula designers and material developers. Likewise, this study may highlight the need of teacher training in Pakistan. Furthermore, since most of the studies in the field of anxiety are quantitative in nature, it is hoped that this qualitative study may give a more comprehensive and thorough picture of this topic.

2. Literature Review

There are basically three types of anxiety namely, trait, state and situation-specific. Trait anxiety is a permanent part of one's personality. It is not temporary and transient and one can become anxious in any situation (MacIntyre, 1999). State anxiety is experienced at a particular point in time. It is temporary and can decrease or disappear after sometime (Spielberger, 1983). For example, a language student may not be anxious but he/she may experience anxiety when asked to speak in front of the whole class. These two approaches could not explain foreign language anxiety convincingly (Horwitz et al., 1986). Therefore, the writers proposed that language learning situations produce a specific type of anxiety that is different from its other types. Thus, they defined language anxiety 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). The concept of FLA as a unique type of anxiety specific to foreign language learning has been supported by many research studies and it is found that this perspective gives a better and deeper understanding of anxiety (for example, Trang, 2012; Zheng, 2008; and Cao, 2011).

According to Horwitz et al. (1986), three related performance anxieties include communication apprehension (CA), test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension refers to a fear experienced before or during communication with people (Jung & McCroskey, 2004). CA related to foreign language classrooms is different from that in other contexts. In a language classroom, while the main focus is on interpersonal interactions (speaking and listening), students are performing two tasks simultaneously: they have to learn the language as well as perform in it in the classroom. In addition, a typical language class requires learners to participate in various speaking activities which can make them the centre of others' attention; thus, they can frequently experience CA in class. Thus, the modern language classroom's emphasis on oral activities and the frequent assessment of speaking skills could be particularly anxiety inducing for students who are apprehensive about speaking.

Test anxiety refers to anxiety in terms of tests and presentations. It is a fear experienced during academic evaluations (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Fear of negative evaluation (FNE), is defined as an "apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively" (Horwitz et al., 1986:128). It is noteworthy that FNE is similar to test anxiety; however, its broader scope differentiates it from test anxiety. Horwitz et al., (1986) argue that, unlike test anxiety, FNE is not dependent only on test-taking situations; rather it may happen in any social and/or evaluative situation. For instance, it can occur in group discussion, or speaking in a foreign language class.

Anxiety can be either facilitating or debilitating. Facilitating language anxiety motivates language students to accept new learning tasks and challenges them to improve their performance. According to Young (1986), facilitating language anxiety is "an increase in drive level which results in improved performance". Debilitating anxiety impedes language learning and negatively affects learners' performance and achievement. It motivates learners to adopt avoidance behaviour and flee the new learning task (Wang, 2005). Debilitating language anxiety may produce a vicious circle; the more students avoid participation in classes to evade anxiety the less they would improve their performance, which, in turn, could produce more anxiety.

In summary, facilitating language anxiety may improve performance and debilitating language anxiety might obstruct performance. The effects of both types of anxiety may vary from student to student in terms of, for example, how they view anxiety, their strategies to cope with it, and how motivated they are to learn the target language. Thus, one theoretical implication could be that language anxiety may be 'response-specific' as well as 'situation-specific' since its effects on performance might be determined by the student's response towards it.

A number of studies have been conducted in terms of teachers' perceptions about the role of anxiety in language classroom. For example, Trang et al. (2013) examined the awareness of and attitudes towards language anxiety of 419 English-major students and 8 EFL teachers in a university in Vietnam. The data were gathered by questionnaires, interviews and student autobiographies. The authors found that most of the teachers could not understand the effects of anxiety on students and believed that anxiety exists only in a small number of students. Moreover, they believed that anxiety is not a serious problem and it could facilitate learning. In contrast, the majority of the students regarded anxiety as a serious problem affecting their performance. Similarly, Ohata (2005) conducted interviews with seven experienced ESL/EFL teachers at the University of Pennsylvania, US, to identify

any gaps between the viewpoints of teachers and students on the role of anxiety in language classes. Ohata noted some gaps and differences between the perceptions of students and teachers on the function of anxiety in language learning. This result also agrees with Azarfam & Baki's (2012) study, which was conducted in Iran. Chan & Wu (2004) interviewed nine English language teachers. The study found a strong correlation between students' FLA scores and teachers' personality. Likewise, Abu-Rabia's (2004) study found that language teacher was one of the main predictors of anxiety. Additionally, Zhang (2010) found that students' anxiety levels mainly depend upon the way the teachers view anxiety. Zhang further explained that students may experience more anxiety in the class of a teacher who believes that anxiety does not exist in the class.

3. Methodology and Research Design
3.1. Research Methods
The majority of anxiety studies followed quantitative methods to collect data (Alghothani, 2010; Horwitz, 2013). Therefore, these studies could not explore participants' views thoroughly. A number of studies have suggested exploring anxiety through interviews (such as Liu & Jackson, 2008; Dewaele & Thirtle, 2009). Therefore, this study used in-depth semi-structured interviews as a research method.

3.2. Research Sites and Sample of the Study
Research sites include five university departments in five public sector universities in Pakistan. Fourteen Pakistani EFL teachers from five universities were interviewed in order to investigate their views about their students' SA and their current strategies to reduce it. The sample consisted of both male and female teachers. Their teaching experience ranged from 6 to 19 years. All of the teachers had gained minimum of a master's degree in English language and literature.

3.3. Data Collection Procedures
The teachers' semi-structured interview protocol comprised six main questions. Interviews with 14 teachers were conducted in English, tape-recorded and finally transcribed. Interviewees' permission was gained to conduct and record the interviews and they were assured that the interviews were not for their evaluation. They were also assured of the strict confidentiality of their responses. The duration of each interview session was approximately from 28-40 minutes.

3.4. Data Analysis Procedures
Interviews were analyzed through exploratory content analysis following the three steps suggested by Miles & Huberman (1994): data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing.

4. Data Analysis
At the beginning of each interview, I asked teachers questions such as 'please share your feelings and experiences about your students' English learning and also about when they speak in the class'. During this conversation, they were almost unanimous in declaring that several students regard speaking as the most difficult activity in class. The formal semi-structured interviews revolved around the following four main questions: teachers' views about their students' speaking anxiety (SA), about their anxious students, their strategies to reduce their students' SA, and whether they had attended any formal training programmes to teach speaking in a less stressful classroom climate.

4.1. Teachers' Views on their Students' Speaking Anxiety
Several studies such as those by Lin (2009), Tsiplakides & Keramida (2009), and Chan & Wu (2004) note that some English teachers might not have adequate understanding of the influence of anxiety on their students' speaking performance. When asked their views about their students' SA, several teachers in this study stated, in general, that they had not heard the term 'foreign language speaking anxiety' or read about it. However, their interviews revealed that they knew about their students' general feelings of nervousness, uneasiness and frustration in class. Thus, after being introduced to the concept of SA, they agreed that many students try to avoid oral activities and do not feel relaxed when speaking in class. When asked their viewpoints about the impacts of anxiety on students' spoken English, several teachers presented potential and illustrative comments on the basis of their experience and observation. Their views can be divided into three categories.

4.1.1 Anxiety Affects Students' Speaking Skills
As mentioned above, some teachers did not have apparently enough knowledge of SA; however, since it is a common phenomenon in foreign language classes I explained the common problems, including SA, faced by students in a foreign language class. Consequently, many interviewees reported that language anxiety does exist in their classes and it has debilitative effects on students' speaking.

For example, Jamal's following comment revealed the harmful effects of SA on students and suggested that anxiety can affect the main variables, motivation and confidence, which facilitate learning speaking. He confirmed:

> *Yes, I can say for sure that speaking anxiety kills the motivation and confidence of students. I know some students who behave like a fish out of water when they are asked to speak. They really tremble ... they don't want to participate in oral tasks.*

Similarly, Aziz's following statement suggested that anxiety can impair students' cognitive processing of information and interfere with their performance, an observation also reported by Krashen (1982). Eventually, it may hinder their improvement. Aziz commented:

> *I don't know much about speaking anxiety but I think anxiousness blocks students' minds. They can't make progress. If they make a single mistake or other students laugh at them, they stutter and behave like a dumb person.*

Nighat provided evidence that anxious students could become perfectionists. As Gregersen & Horwitz (2002) found, such students procrastinate with their assignments and are minimally involved in classroom activities. As a result, their participation may decrease, anxiety may increase, and improvement might not occur. The following quote from Nighat's interview reveals that SA can make students perfectionists, as well as affect their participation in oral activities:

> *Some students think that speaking in class is a big responsibility. Thus, they have to be perfect. I think speaking in class is something frightening for them … some students really do not utter a word and they sit quiet. You ask them to go ahead and they will not utter a word.*

In the same vein, Umair suggested that SA is always present in foreign language classrooms, and it can affect students' willingness and confidence. In turn, they may be afraid of making mistakes and taking part in class. He commented thus:

> *I think speaking anxiety exists in every English classroom in Pakistan. Many students do not volunteer to present something. And they do not raise hands due to the fear that they might be wrong. Moreover, they do not ask questions and a lot more. Hence, I am not wrong in saying that language anxiety can derail the language learning process.*

The interview data showed that SA can have cyclical effects. For example, if the teacher corrects students' errors harshly, they may grow afraid of making mistakes and reduce their participation. In turn, learning may not occur and they may experience more SA. Haroon highlighted this problem:

> *Many students are afraid of taking part in discussions or conversation in class due to speaking anxiety. But the trouble is that if they don't participate, they will not learn and in this way, they will increase their fears and difficulties.*

4.1.2 Students Do Not Feel Speaking Anxiety

Some teachers, however, did not acknowledge the existence of SA and reported that students do not feel anxious when speaking English in class. They believed that some students are just uninterested, unintelligent and incompetent; therefore, they cannot perform well in class. Gregersen (2003) noticed similarly that although anxiety is a common phenomenon in foreign language classes, some teachers ascribe students' unwillingness to speak to factors such as lack of motivation and of interest.

One such teacher was Habib, who clearly stated:

> *I don't think students feel nervous or tense in oral activities. They are students and they have to be afraid of the teacher … it is not speaking anxiety but as I said they have to lower their necks in front of the teacher to learn.*

Habib's comment reflects his unawareness of SA and sense of authority, superiority and a negative attitude towards students. This mind-set about students could be detrimental to their language acquisition.

Similarly, Haneef believed that it is not anxiety which makes students evade oral activities, but rather a lack of interest in English:

> *I think some students don't want to speak. They don't like English class, teacher and speaking. Perhaps they have more interest in other subjects; therefore, they don't participate in oral tasks in class. You have to force them to get them involved in class.*

In the same vein, Arif reported that some students may be incompetent; therefore they cannot speak:

> *They are not anxious. They can't speak because they are inefficient and they don't have the ability to speak well.*

It is indeed possible that some students might not be interested in learning English; therefore, they might not take part actively in the class. However, attributing non-participation to lack of interest without any discussion or evidence of the real cause seems to indicate a negative attitude. Perhaps they are not interested in oral tasks due to SA or, as claimed by Jamal above, anxiety affects students' interest.

4.1.3 Anxiety Facilitates Speaking

Interestingly two teachers referred to the constructive aspects of anxiety. They believed that it can motivate students to increase their efforts to achieve their goals. For example, Mukhtiar's following comment suggests the facilitative role of anxiety:

> *Anxiety does not influence students' English speaking but encourages them to overcome their weaknesses. If they are worried about their speaking performance, they will work hard to do better … this anxiousness is a key to improve.*

In the same vein, although Aziz believed that anxiety may affect students' spoken English, he opined that it can also be a big push and stimulant for them:

> *… it [anxiety] can also be a blessing in disguise for some students. If they feel stressful and disappointed that they cannot speak well, they will try their best to improve themselves. I think they get serious and they utilise their all abilities to perform better when they find that they are less competent than others.*

When asked how much anxiety a student can manage in a positive way, he said, *"I can't tell but not too much"*. Although anxiety might make students pay more attention to their spoken proficiency, teachers may not over-estimate the positive effects of anxiety on the oral aspects of English. Moreover, analysis presented above in this chapter seems to suggest that the majority of students experience debilitative anxiety. Similarly, MacIntyre & Gardner (1991a) state that "language anxiety consistently, negatively affects language learning and production" (p. 302).

4.2 Teachers' Views about Anxious Students

When asked whether they had ever noticed that some of their students experience anxiety in various situations or activities that require them to speak English, the teachers gave multiple answers. Their opinions can be divided into two categories: students do not feel good due to other problems; students do not feel good due to SA.

4.2.1 Students Do Not Feel Comfortable Due to Other Problems

Although the teachers admitted that speaking in front of the class is a challenging task for students, several of them had not taken students' discomfort into account from the perspective of SA. Moreover, they had noticed that students are afraid of speaking but had just ignored this or attached some other explanation to their SA.

One teacher in this study, Habib, thought that students do not feel good in the classroom due to their domestic or personal problems. Although such concerns can make students uneasy in the class, it may not always be the cause. They could be silent and worried in class due to SA.

Habib stated:

> *Some students appear disturbed in the class ... a bit reluctant when asked to participate in speaking activities ... I think their domestic or personal problems might be disturbing them.*

When asked if he had ever asked them about their discomfort or unwillingness to participate, he said:

> *I am sorry to say but I think my job is to come and deliver a lecture ... I don't need to be too personal with them as I am not their nurse or father.*

Haneef thought that students do not want to speak because they are unable to speak. However, foreign language learning is a complex process and besides learners' mental capabilities, it may be affected by various other factors such as affective ones. It is possible that some intelligent students may not be successful language learners. Such teachers' views might affect students' learning. Haneef stated:

> *I think they [students] do not have the capability of speaking English or perhaps they are not gifted students. They do not have good ideas and that is the reason they are reluctant to speak.*

Mureed had a different interpretation; he believed that some students are introverts and they cannot perform comfortably because being anxious is a part of their personality.

> *Some students are naturally anxious. They always try to hide themselves. I think they are not comfortable at their homes. Yes, I know some students who become extremely gloomy after making mistakes.*

When asked how he could help such students in his class, he said, *"Well, I am not sure how I can help. I think it is difficult to change their habits and personality"*.

Lateef was also unaware of SA, he said, *"I did not know that anxiety is related to language learning, I simply know that this term is used in the medical field"*. He gave his view of students' anxiousness in the class, stating *"I think students do not like English class and take interest in speaking activities due to the pressure of other subjects"*. He further added, *"They look a bit upset but I think not very anxious"*.

4.2.2 Students Do Not Feel Comfortable Due to SA

On the other hand, some teachers stated that they had observed some of their students feeling anxious when asked to participate in oral activities in class. Humaira for example had noticed students' SA through their facial expressions and behaviour:

> *Yes, many times. You ask a question, look at the class ... you can see them easily. Their faces tell you everything. They appear very worried. Once the question is answered, you can see them relaxed.*

Jamal had not only identified anxious students but also had guided them to make them feel comfortable:

> *I know some students who shiver during their presentations. And you can guess by seeing their physical condition that how they are feeling ... I have discussed some students' speaking anxiety with them. For example, one student was afraid of making mistakes and I assured him that he should not worry about mistakes.*

In the Pakistani context, it could be difficult for the students to share their SA with their teachers. Thus, the teachers could ask anxious students about their problems and difficulties in class. Furthermore, students may be encouraged to share their problems with their teachers if they are friendly and sympathetic.

Haroon had also noticed some of his students feeling uncomfortable in class, so, he read some research to address his students' SA.

I noticed some of my students frequently feeling upset when speaking. Therefore, I browsed
topics on internet such as, why language students feel uncomfortable in class. And I came across
some articles about foreign language anxiety which were very useful.

4.3 Teachers' Strategies to Reduce Students' Anxiety About Speaking in Classroom

Although the teachers agreed that anxiety can have debilitative effects on students' speaking performance, when asked their strategies to reduce their students' SA, several teachers reported that they had not addressed it. For example, Aziz reported that he had not employed any strategies to mitigate his students' SA since he believed that his duty is just to teach students and not to ask about their problems or difficulties:

I have never thought of any formal strategies. My job is to go and teach them [students] ... we
are together until the class is over and then, I have no concern.

Similarly, Habib believed that his job is solely to teach students speaking; it is not his responsibility to ask them about their problems and difficulties. His comment below indicates that some teachers may even intentionally ignore their students' SA. Likewise, they may believe that it is students' own concern if they are unmotivated or uncomfortable.

If they don't feel OK it is their problem to manage ... if they are good learners they have to be
motivated and ready for challenges. I never asked them about such things as I am not bound to
ask.

Some teachers were not using any strategies to manage their students' SA because they were unaware of any strategies. For example, Rustam clearly stated, *"I mean what kind of strategies ... I do not know any ways"*. Likewise, Haneef showed his unawareness of SA managing strategies as well as a lack of discussion about academic topics among teachers:

I never thought in this way in class and I am unaware. Other teachers never discussed such
things with me or told me about any methods to reduce students' speaking anxiety.

However, he further reported that he will ask students about their SA.

There are factors that may also discourage teachers from using any strategies to address their students' problems, including SA. For example, Humaira was willing to help her students but failed to do so due to large classes, since it was hard for her to pay attention to each student:

I wish to but I can't talk to too many students. I will have to spend many days talking to each
student. I should know their problems but I do not know. However, I try to make them feel good.

Additionally, Mureed exposed the weaknesses of Pakistani teachers and teaching culture. It appears that some teachers really may be unaware of SA or as said above, some just may ignore it intentionally. He explained:

All depends upon your philosophy of teaching. Some teachers like to show themselves as strict
and an authority. They know that students are not feeling good but they will not notice them. If
you like you can teach them [students] in a strict way or if you like in a friendly way ... no one
complains or asks ...

On the other hand, some teachers reported that they had used, or would use, certain strategies to alleviate their students' SA. The following strategies were reported by the teachers.

4.3.1 Relaxed Classroom Environment

Three teachers reported that the provision of a sociable and secure classroom climate is a helpful strategy to alleviate students' anxious feelings and promote their speaking. Nighat stated that students feel relaxed and participate more actively and confidently in a warm and positive classroom environment; thus, she created a healthy climate in the class. She stated:

I think a comfortable classroom atmosphere is as important for students as oxygen for humans.
I try to make my classroom open and relaxed. And I have found that students feel active and
they are less afraid of speaking.

Jamal's strategy to reduce his students' SA was to create a sociable and friendly classroom atmosphere. Moreover, his statement indicates that activities such as telling jokes and allowing students to speak about their favourite topics could make the classroom environment relaxed. Jamal said:

Yes, one strategy is that I make my classroom a common room where students feel free to sit
and chat. Sometimes, they tell jokes. I ask them to speak about anything they like and tell their
experiences to others so that they should become friends. Thus, they feel secure and relaxed.

4.3.2 Friendly Behaviour

Three teachers believed that teachers' friendly relations with their students can reduce SA. Umair indicated that friendly behaviour on the part of the teacher lessens students' SA and encourages them to learn more:

My method is to behave like a friend with them. I do not show that I am superior to them.
Sometimes, we tell funny stories ... I laugh with them. My positive attitude makes them
comfortable as well as motivates them to ask me questions without any hesitation.

His further comment indicates that teachers' personal interest in students, shown by listening to their problems, could facilitate their learning to speak. Empathetic behaviour by the teacher can help students overcome their SA on one hand, and give teachers insight into managing their students' SA on the other. Umair continued:

I tell them that my door is always open for you and you are welcome to come and meet me. I
ask them about their concerns to show my attachment with them and they look satisfied.

In the same vein, Nighat was caring towards her students. Her strategy was to ask herself how students can feel good. This practice of reflecting is helpful in the language learning process (Mullock, 2003). Nighat stated:

I place myself in my students' position and then I decide what I should do. I show them that I
am always there to help them. I mean I show that I am concerned about them.

4.3.3 Interesting Topics and Activities

Three teachers stated that they gave students interesting topics and used interesting activities in class in order to attract their interest and reduce their boredom. For example, Haroon's strategy was to give students interesting topics for oral tasks rather than complicated ones. Moreover, sometimes he allowed them to choose their own topics. In this way, he believed, students feel interested and participate more actively in class. He said:

Students feel interested and relaxed if the topics for presentation or discussion are interesting.
Thus, I do not assign them political or religious topics but simple ones or I let them choose the
topics.

Although it was hard for Humaira to give time to students for individual help, she did incorporate interesting, relevant, and suitable oral activities to maintain their interest in the class:

I select activities which are interesting as well as helpful to improve students' daily life
communication needs. Moreover, those activities which suit their proficiency levels so that they
should speak up.

Niaz was also using interesting activities and when asked about an example of such activities, he answered, *"Debates, asking students to give positive and negative comments about any topic for example, TV ... students get more involved ... and role plays"*.

4.3.4 Group-Work

Some teachers used the activity of group-work to reduce their students' SA. For example, although it was difficult for Haroon to use and manage group-work in a large class, he had used it since it encouraged students to speak English:

Some students can't speak when alone but they can speak and feel less anxious when in groups.
Thus, I divide my students into groups to perform speaking tasks. Sometimes, making groups
and supervising them becomes difficult due to a large number of students in my class.

This finding seems to indicate that teachers who want to use group-work in their classes may be discouraged due to constraints such as large classes.

Humaira also used group-work in class, stating *"I divide my students into various groups for discussion activities"*.

Likewise, Jamal reported that group-work allows students to get to know each other on the one hand, and improves their learning on the other:

I assign oral presentations to three or four students to make. I think this technique is important
to get them closer as well as allowing them to learn from each other. Moreover, they are not
afraid of the fear of being ridiculed for their poor performance.

4.3.5 Encouragement

Three teachers were utilising the approach of positive reinforcement to strengthen their students' confidence, lessen their stress, and increase their participation. Nighat encouraged poorly-performing students to do better. Moreover, she motivated them to speak without any fear of mistakes or of negative evaluation, in order to increase their confidence. She stated:

If my students' speaking performance is poor, I encourage them that they have the ability to do
better. Moreover, I make any positive point out of their work and appreciate that. Similarly, I
try to address their fears such as I ask them to speak without caring about mistakes or what
other people think of them so that they should feel confident.

Umair's strategy was to ask weak students easy questions to encourage them and involve them in the learning process:

I ask weak students simple questions as I know they will be able to answer. My purpose is to
reduce their fear of speaking and to encourage them to participate.

4.4 Formal Training on Teaching Speaking in a Comfortable and Facilitating Classroom Environment

Teachers were asked various questions about their formal training, for example, whether they had attended any teacher training programmes, ELT workshops/courses, or professional development programmes which could enable them to teach students speaking effectively, in a facilitating and comfortable classroom environment, how to behave with students and manage the class, and how to address students' fears, beliefs, and their other problems and difficulties associated with learning a foreign language. Professional development programmes enable the teachers to make their teaching more effective and productive and to motivate students and boost their confidence (Mullock, 2006). As a result, students may feel less stressful in class and their language learning and speaking

may be a more pleasant experience. Moreover, Machida (2011) reports that if teachers are not formally trained they may not be able to understand and address students' anxiety.

In this study, all the teachers except four reported that they had not received any formal training. However, three teachers had completed a B.Ed (Bachelor of Education) degree and one of them had been awarded an M.Ed (Master of Education).

Four teachers answered that they had undergone some training on teaching English or speaking. For example, Humaira said:

> *I have got a diploma in TEFL from Allama Iqbal Open University [a university in Pakistan].*
> *The books were very good and I read them thoroughly. They helped me to know my weaknesses*
> *and improve my teaching.*

Similarly, Umair had got a certificate in ELT and attended two teaching workshops conducted by the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan. He reported:

> *I have a certificate in ELT and have attended two teaching workshops run by the HEC. They*
> *were helpful as I had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss various issues with the other*
> *participants. We were taught about classroom management and I got many ideas about common*
> *problems in a language classroom ... now I have developed my own strategies about how to*
> *encourage students to speak and volunteer answers and how to maintain their interest in the*
> *classroom.*

As mentioned above, several teachers had not attended any training programmes. For example, Rustam reported that he had not received any training on how to address students' SA and other language learning problems. He said:

> *No, I haven't received any training. I think without training one can teach speaking*
> *productively. My own past experience as a student guides me a lot on how to help students,*
> *teach them effectively, and supervise the class.*

However, personal experiences may be biased and decisions and help guided by them may not be suitable for all students. On the other hand, training courses are usually designed on the basis of research; thus, training may better facilitate learning.

Similarly, Mureed had not sought any training to provide students with a comfortable classroom environment. Moreover, he had not heard about any such training from his colleagues. He commented:

> *I have not attended any courses or training to lessen students' stress and pressure in a language*
> *class and address students' other problems. Moreover, none of my colleagues ever talked about*
> *such seminars or workshops.*

Similarly, when asked whether he had attended any training programmes to inform him what kind of attitude can make students comfortable and how to address their difficulties and concerns, Aziz reported that he was unfamiliar with any such kind of programme. Moreover, he stated that how to behave with students depends on the teacher. He said, *"I am unaware. But it depends upon you; you can be gentle or stern".*

Finally, Mukhtiar had not attended any training programme and moreover, he argued that most of the teachers are unaware of effective language teaching methods due to the lack of research in the field of ELT in Pakistan: *"Very little is known about classroom issues and effective English teaching since very little research in ELT exists".*

On the other hand, three teachers had not attended any teacher training or professional development programmes, however they had gained the degree of B.Ed and one of them had gained an M.Ed. For instance, Haneef stated:

> *I didn't get any training but I have sought the professional degree of B.Ed which helped me*
> *improve my teaching skills.*

Jamal had also gained his B.Ed degree and it helped him understand students' various problems, since *"in my B.Ed course, I read a subject about psychology. I read different stories of students ... their views and problems regarding their peers, classroom and the teacher".*

In sum, many teachers were not trained to teach speaking in a comfortable classroom environment and address their problems and concerns regarding foreign language learning. Moreover, many teachers in this study were unaware of SA and any strategies to reduce students' SA. Thus, formal training could inform them of students' problems, including SA.

5 Discussion of the Research Findings

Tsai (2008) notes that many foreign language teachers do not have a sufficient understanding of anxiety. In light of the data from this current study, teachers' unawareness of SA and of its ramifications can have various negative consequences. Firstly, teachers may not identify students' SA and may therefore believe that students are not actually anxious. Secondly, if teachers encounter students feeling uncomfortable in class when speaking, they may attribute other factors such as domestic problems and lack of interest as being responsible for their students' discomfiture. Thirdly, teachers may intentionally ignore students' SA and may leave students to solve the problem on their own. Finally, some teachers even claim that anxiety and worry play a part in motivating students to enhance and improve their speaking.

The last finding of the current study concerning the facilitative role of anxiety is consistent with Ohata (2005), Trang et al. (2013), and Azarfam & Baki (2012). Some teachers in these studies also believed that anxiety facilitates learning. Although anxiety can play a positive role by providing students with an inner drive to accept the challenge and achieve their targets, this may depend upon the amount of anxiety, nature of the task and the personality of the student. It is well-documented in the literature that higher levels of anxiety impede learning (Tóth, 2010).

Many explanations could be ascribed to the other three findings listed above: a) the belief that students are not anxious b) attaching other explanations to students' SA, and intentionally ignoring students' SA and leaving them to solve the problem on their own. Trang et al. (2013) investigated the awareness of students and teachers of anxiety in a university in Vietnam. The researchers report that "approximately two-thirds of the students suffered from FLA to some degree, yet the teachers did not attribute adequate importance to it" (p. 216). Similarly, Ohata (2005) reported that some of his teacher participants could not identify their students' anxiety; moreover, they did not consider it a serious problem.

In the Pakistani context, the first reason for not noticing students' SA could be that some teachers might themselves be successful language learners and perhaps they may not have experienced SA. Therefore, it may be difficult for them to understand their students' SA. Secondly, some teachers may not be well-qualified and experienced in teaching English and speaking nor in understanding classroom issues and tackling them. In the Pakistani context, many writers highlight the poor standard of English teaching at many universities. For example, Shamim & Tribble (2005) report that in most of the universities, "English language is taught by visiting teachers instead of a core ELT trained faculty" (p.15). They further state that ELT qualification, "is not a requirement for teaching English in higher education institutions in Pakistan" (p. 12). Therefore, it could be argued that such teachers might not have a clear vision of how to teach speaking in a supportive atmosphere. Additionally, they may not take a personal interest in addressing students' concerns and problems about language learning and speaking.

It was also seen in the data from this study that several teachers had not identified anxious students nor used any strategies to reduce their SA. On the other hand, some teachers had noticed these aspects and had addressed student SA by using strategies. However, the reported strategies do not include those which could reduce other major SA-provoking factors such as error correction, oral test anxiety, grammar, and students' beliefs about language learning and speaking. One reason for the absence of such strategies could be that, as already stated, teachers are not fully aware of SA. However, teacher training programmes can be helpful in developing teachers' understanding and awareness of students' problems stemming from language learning. Nevertheless the data indicated that the majority of teachers had not attended any formal training and professional development programmes to improve their teaching skills to teach speaking more effectively and also to provide students with a comfortable learning speaking experience.

Shamim & Tribble's (2005) study on the current provision for the teaching and learning of English in higher education in Pakistan reports that the majority of teachers do not have formal qualification or training in ELT. Shahbaz (2012) reports that many EFL teachers in Pakistan do not receive any training, even after several years of practice. It is noteworthy that the lack of training is not an issue associated only with ELT, but the same situation can be observed in other areas of teaching in Pakistan. Khan & Fatima (2008) investigated the opinions of 65 teachers at Gomal University, Pakistan, regarding various factors including teacher training. The sample was taken from all departments of the university. It is notable that Gomal University was ranked twelfth best in Pakistan in 2008 (ibid). The researchers report that 67% of the teachers had not attended any in-service training. This finding helps us understand the level of importance that is paid to teacher training at university level in Pakistan.

I suggest that teachers should pay due attention to their students' SA, especially in the Pakistani classrooms where, due to teacher-centred teaching, they may strongly affect and constitute a major part of it. Similarly, they should not perceive SA as being merely a personal problem for the students to manage on their own, because, if it is not well-addressed, it can lead to drop-outs (Bailey et al., 2003). In addition, an effective teacher is never static, instead he/she continues learning. The more teachers are professionally-developed, the more they may teach effectively and Tóth (2010) argues that effective input lessens students' anxiety. Moreover, if students are taught well, they may be able to serve efficiently in different departments and play their part in the progress of their country.

6 Implications and Conclusion

One of the major implications of this study for Pakistani EFL teachers is that language anxiety exists in the language classrooms and it negatively impacts language learning process. Therefore, language teachers may be aware of anxiety, they should acknowledge its existence and accept anxiety as a serious problem in language classrooms. They should not just ascribe students' poor language competency to students' lack of interest, of motivation and poor attitude, but they should also consider the possibility of anxiety. Thus, teachers should help their students manage their anxiety.

It seems particularly important that teachers should have a positive and friendly relationship with their students. For example, they then may present themselves as 'facilitators' rather than authority figures. As Young (1991) reported that the majority of anxiety sources are related to instructional and methodological practices, and it

highlights that teachers are often doing, "something fundamentally unnatural" (p. 421). Creating an anxiety-free classroom for students, however, is often considerably harder in practice than in theory. Nevertheless, it is recommended that teachers should be as sensitive as possible to students' SA.

It is recommended that a mechanism and systems for teacher-training be implemented to equip EFL teachers with the necessary skills to address affective factors, such as anxiety, that may influence foreign language learning and speaking. Similarly, workshops and language teaching conferences should be held to inform teachers about the phenomena of speaking and language anxiety, their ramifications and the effective means to reduce speaking and language anxiety.

6.1 Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate Pakistani EFL university teachers' views about their students' SA and the methods teachers currently use to address it. The data revealed that the majority of teachers were unaware of the phenomenon of anxiety and they did not consider it a serious issue in the language classrooms. Moreover, most of the teachers were either unaware or were not using anxiety strategies to reduce their students' speaking anxiety. The study suggested that Pakistani EFL teachers should consider anxiety as a legitimate issue and pay due attention to their students' anxiety.

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