ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING ANXIETY AMONG ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STUDENTS AT PAKTIKA INSTITUTE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract. *This study, using a sequential explanatory mixed design, comprehensively examined the prevalence, severity, and sources of English learning anxiety among Afghan male students learning English as a foreign language at Paktika Institute of Higher Education. In the quantitative part of the study, data were collected from 87 valid respondents using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Descriptive analyses revealed that 69% of the students experienced moderate anxiety and 21.8% experienced high anxiety. Among the various factors, fear of negative evaluation and fear of communication were identified as the most prominent concerns and sources of anxiety. In the qualitative phase, data were collected through purposeful semi-structured interviews with 12 participants and analyzed using thematic analysis.*

The analysis revealed five main themes, which were: fear of negative evaluation, fear of communication, limitations in English exposure and practice, the influence of teacher and peer behavior, and anxiety related to tests and performance. Participants detailed how classroom dynamics, the lack of appropriate environments for using English outside the classroom, and high-risk and stressful assessments contributed to their increased anxiety levels. The findings of this study emphasize the multifaceted and context-dependent nature of language anxiety and show that language learning anxiety among Afghan learners is influenced by multiple cultural, environmental, and educational factors. They also highlight the urgent need to adopt supportive teaching approaches, provide more opportunities for language practice in real-world and informal settings, and train teachers to better manage students' anxiety.

Keywords: *Communication Apprehension, Fear of Negative Evaluation, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety, Limited Exposure and Practice, Test and Performance Anxiety.*

Introduction

The journey of learning English as a foreign language (EFL) has become a crucial goal in Afghanistan, especially in recent years, where being proficient in English is seen as vital for both academic success and socioeconomic progress (Ahmad et al., 2018). In this setting, students in the English department at the Paktika Institute of Higher Education encounter not just the usual hurdles of learning a new language, but also a tangled web of psychological challenges, with language learning anxiety standing out as a major concern.

This anxiety, which refers to the nervousness or fear that arises when using English, has been widely acknowledged as a significant obstacle to both language acquisition and effective communication (Horwitz et al., 1986; Horwitz, 2010).

Language learning anxiety, especially when it comes to speaking, is a well-documented issue that many EFL learners face around the globe (Woodrow, 2006; Liu, 2018; Alnahidh & Altalhab, 2020). In Afghanistan, this challenge is made even tougher by ongoing sociopolitical instability, limited chances to engage in real English-speaking environments, and traditional teaching methods that often focus more on memorization than on actual communication (Anwari, 2019; Bakhtyari & Kassim, 2022). Studies in similar settings have revealed that anxiety can show up in different ways, such as fear of being judged, worries about communicating, and test-related stress, all of which can negatively impact students' performance and their willingness to get involved in class activities (Horwitz et al., 1986; Wardhani, 2019). It's crucial to tackle English language learning anxiety among Afghan university students, especially as English becomes increasingly important for accessing global knowledge, job opportunities, and international collaboration (Ahmad et al., 2018; Tahsildar & Kabiri, 2019). Yet, despite its significance, there's still a lack of thorough research into the causes and effects of language anxiety in Afghan higher education (Akramy, 2020; Bakhtyari & Kassim, 2022). This gap is particularly noticeable in Paktika province, where educational resources are limited and students may encounter unique sociocultural pressures that heighten their anxiety.

The way we think about language learning anxiety has changed a lot since the groundbreaking research by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope in 1986, who first pointed out that it's a unique issue separate from general anxiety. Since then, researchers have dug deeper into the complex nature of language anxiety, connecting it to various cognitive, emotional, and situational factors (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Dörnyei, 2020; Yu, 2021). For example, MacIntyre and Gardner found that anxiety can disrupt cognitive processes, making it harder to understand and produce language. Additionally, other studies have shown that personal factors, like personality traits and self-confidence, play a significant role in how anxiety is experienced and its effects on language learning (Tianjian, 2010; Tahsildar & Kabiri, 2019).

In Afghanistan, several factors contribute to anxiety around learning English, including limited exposure to the language, a lack of supportive learning environments, and the fear of being judged by peers and teachers (Ahmad et al., 2018; Tahsildar & Kabiri, 2019). Additionally, cultural views on error correction and public speaking can heighten students' anxiety levels (Akramy, 2020). Since English proficiency is crucial for academic and professional success, and anxiety has been shown to negatively affect language learning outcomes (Bakhtyari & Kassim, 2022), it's essential to thoroughly investigate how prevalent and what sources of English language learning anxiety are among students in the English department at the Paktika Institute of Higher Education. This research is vital not only for shaping teaching strategies to reduce anxiety but also for adding to the existing literature on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning in less-studied contexts. Therefore, this study aims to delve into the levels, sources, and impacts of English language learning anxiety among students at the Paktika Institute. By focusing on the unique sociocultural and educational landscape of Paktika, the research hopes to provide insights that are relevant both locally and in the broader academic

community regarding language anxiety. In conclusion, grasping the nuances of English language learning anxiety in Afghanistan's higher education system is key to creating more effective, supportive, and inclusive language learning environments. The outcomes of this research are anticipated to significantly influence curriculum development, teacher training, and student support services, ultimately enhancing English language education in Afghanistan and similar contexts.

Research Questions: **RQ1**. What is the prevalence and intensity of English language learning anxiety among English Department students at Paktika Institute of Higher Education?

RQ2. How do English Department students at Paktika Institute of Higher Education describe their experiences and perceived sources of English language learning anxiety in classroom and communicative contexts?

Review of the Related Literature: English language learning anxiety has become a significant topic in applied linguistics, especially when it comes to acquiring a foreign language.

Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) were pioneers in identifying foreign language anxiety as a distinct type of situation-specific anxiety, different from general anxiety, that stems from the hurdles of learning and using a new language. They described it as a complex issue that includes communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. This three-part model has laid the groundwork for further research and the development of tools like the well-known Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (Horwitz, 2010)

The way we understand language anxiety has come a long way, recognizing how it intertwines with various cognitive, emotional, and social factors. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) showed that anxiety can really throw a wrench in cognitive processing, which can hurt performance in both understanding and producing language. More recent studies have pointed out that language anxiety is not static; it can change quickly based on what's happening in the classroom, as Khatereh and Shirvan (2020) noted. They emphasized that learners' anxiety levels can shift dramatically depending on the topics being discussed and the nature of interactions.

Additionally, Dörnyei (2020) and Xia Yu (2021) have called for a deeper understanding that takes into account motivation, self-belief, and how learners perceive their own abilities, all of which play a significant role in shaping their experiences with anxiety.

The importance of language anxiety is highlighted by how it affects language learning outcomes. A wealth of research has demonstrated that higher levels of anxiety tend to correlate negatively with language skills and the ability to communicate effectively (Luo, 2013; Ran et al., 2022). Specifically, speaking anxiety can be particularly crippling, often causing students to avoid speaking up and participate less in class activities (Woodrow, 2006; Liu, 2018). This issue is especially pertinent in EFL settings, where chances for real communication are scarce, making classroom interactions the main opportunity for practicing the language (Richards, 2008).

The negative impact of language anxiety on the academic performance and classroom participation of EFL learners has been thoroughly explored in various studies. It's been shown that high anxiety levels often correlate with poorer outcomes in language courses, less oral proficiency, and a decreased willingness to engage in communication (Horwitz et al., 1986; Luo, 2013). MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) found solid evidence that anxiety disrupts cognitive processes, making it harder for students to understand and produce language.

This cognitive interference is especially pronounced during speaking tasks, where the stress of having to perform on the spot can heighten anxiety and result in communication failures (Woodrow, 2006; Liu, 2018).

In Afghanistan, the challenges posed by language anxiety are made even tougher due to the limited chances for genuine English communication and the absence of encouraging learning environments. Bakhtyari and Kassim (2022) found that Afghan university students who experienced high levels of anxiety were less inclined to engage in classroom discussions and often shied away from speaking activities altogether. This tendency to avoid speaking not only hinders their language growth but also creates a vicious cycle of anxiety and disengagement (Anwari, 2019; Akramy, 2020). Similar trends have been observed in other English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, where students' fear of making mistakes and being judged by their peers or teachers results in decreased participation and, ultimately, lower language proficiency (Kayaoğlu & Sağlamel, 2013; Bhatti & Memon, 2016).

The connection between language anxiety and learning outcomes is influenced by both individual and contextual factors. For instance, Tahsildar and Kabiri (2019) discovered that students who had higher academic self-efficacy were more capable of managing their anxiety and keeping up their performance during speaking tasks. On the flip side, students who struggled with low self-confidence and held negative beliefs about language learning were more vulnerable to the harmful effects of anxiety (Horwitz, 1988; Toghraee & Shahrokhi, 2014).

Additionally, the support from teachers and the overall classroom environment have been recognized as vital elements in reducing anxiety and creating a more positive learning atmosphere (Azizpour & Gholami, 2022). Given these insights, it's clear that language anxiety can be a major obstacle to effective language learning, especially in situations where students are already dealing with various external pressures. Tackling this challenge calls for a comprehensive strategy that addresses not just the psychological aspects of anxiety but also the wider educational and sociocultural context in which language learning occurs.

Method

Participants: The study involved 90 Afghan EFL students from the Paktika Institute of Higher Education. We used a convenience sampling method to select participants, which meant we included students who were easily accessible and eager to take part in the research (Creswell, 2012). The demographic makeup of our sample mirrored the academic structure of the English department, of undergraduate students.

Design of the Study: This research utilized a mixed-methods design, specifically the explanatory sequential mixed methods approach. To start, quantitative data was collected through a structured questionnaire aimed at assessing how prevalent and intense English language learning anxiety is among EFL students. After that, qualitative data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with a carefully selected group of participants, allowing for a deeper exploration of their personal experiences and perceptions regarding language anxiety.

Instruments

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) Questionnaire: In the quantitative phase of the study, we used the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), which was originally created by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope back in 1986.

This scale is a well-respected tool that helps gauge the levels and sources of anxiety that students face in foreign language classrooms. It features 33 statements that participants rate on a five-point Likert scale, from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The FLCAS looks at different aspects of language anxiety, such as communication apprehension, test anxiety, and the fear of negative evaluation—factors that are crucial in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings (Horwitz et al., 1986; Woodrow, 2006; Karatas et al., 2016). This scale has been widely utilized in various studies across different cultural and educational contexts, proving to be both reliable and valid (Alnahidh & Altalhab, 2020; Bakhtyari & Kassim, 2022). For our research, the questionnaire was given in English, and we provided explanations in the students' native languages when needed to make sure they understood the questions and could respond accurately. We evaluated the reliability of the FLCAS in this study using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which showed a high internal consistency with a value of 0.91, indicating that the scale is highly reliable.

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol: For the qualitative phase, we crafted a semi-structured interview protocol aimed at diving into participants' personal experiences, perceptions, and coping strategies when it comes to dealing with anxiety around learning English. The interview questions were shaped by existing literature on language anxiety, specifically designed to draw out detailed responses about what triggers this anxiety, how it shows up in classroom settings and during communication, and how it affects students' engagement and performance academically. The semi-structured approach provided the flexibility to dig deeper into participants' answers and adjust questions based on the themes that emerged during our conversations (Creswell, 2012). We conducted the interviews in either English or the participants' preferred language to ensure everyone felt comfortable and could express themselves freely. Each session lasted about 20 to 30 minutes and was recorded with the participants' consent, so we could transcribe and analyze the themes later on.

Results and Findings

Preliminary Analyses

Prior to main analyses, all data were screened for completeness, accuracy, and normality.

Out of 90 distributed questionnaires, 87 were deemed valid. Missing data were minimal (<2%) and handled via pairwise deletion. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's α = .91), confirming reliability in this context (Horwitz et al., 1986; Karatas et al., 2016). Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests indicated FLCAS scores were normally distributed (p > .05).

Prevalence and Intensity of English Language Learning Anxiety

The FLCAS (33 items; range: 33–165) was used to assess anxiety. Descriptive statistics and frequency distributions were calculated. Cut-off scores were based on established conventions (Horwitz et al., 1986; Bakhtyari & Kassim, 2022):

- Low Anxiety: 33–65
- Moderate Anxiety: 66–132
- High Anxiety: 133–165

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) total scores obtained from 87 students. The FLCAS, consisting of 33 items with

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possible scores ranging from 33 to 165, measures the intensity of English language learning anxiety. This table summarizes the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum scores, providing an overview of the general anxiety levels experienced by the participants.

Table1. Descriptive Statistics for FLCAS Scores (N = 87)

Variable	Mean (M)	SD	Min	Max
FLCAS Total	109.60	17.21	68	154

The average total score on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was 109.60, with a standard deviation of 17.21. Scores varied from 68 to 154, suggesting that, generally, students felt a moderate level of anxiety while learning English. This average score falls right in the moderate anxiety range, which is between 66 and 132. The range of scores indicates that there's quite a bit of difference in anxiety levels among students—some felt relatively calm, while others experienced significant anxiety. This pattern is consistent with earlier studies that found moderate anxiety is quite common among language learners, although many students do face higher levels of anxiety that might hinder their learning journey.

Table 2 categorizes the 87 students into three anxiety levels-low, moderate, and high-based on their FLCAS total scores. The table shows the number and percentage of students in each category, offering insight into the prevalence of different anxiety intensities within the sample.

Table 2. Distribution of Anxiety Levels

Anxiety Level	n	%
Low	8	9.2%
Moderate	60	69.0%
High	19	21.8%

A significant number of students, about 69.0%, reported feeling moderate anxiety, which suggests that many learners deal with a noticeable yet manageable level of anxiety when it comes to learning English. Meanwhile, a considerable minority, around 21.8%, experienced high anxiety, which can hinder their participation in class and their ability to pick up the language.

Only a small fraction, about 9.2%, reported low anxiety, indicating that very few students feel completely at ease in English learning environments. These results align with other research showing that while moderate anxiety is common, a notable number of learners struggle with high anxiety, highlighting the importance of targeted support for those who are anxious.

Table 3 lists the five FLCAS items with the highest mean scores (above 4.0), reflecting the specific anxiety-provoking aspects of English language learning. These items highlight common fears and apprehensions experienced by students in the classroom.

Table 3. Highest Mean FLCAS Items

Item Description	Mean	SD
Worry about making mistakes in class	4.22	0.81
Fear of being laughed at by classmates	4.17	0.95
Nervous when the teacher asks questions unexpectedly	4.10	0.99
Trouble understanding spoken English	4.05	0.88
Heart pounds when called on in class	4.01	0.93

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The items that scored the highest are mainly tied to the fear of being negatively evaluated and anxiety about communication. Students expressed the most concern about making mistakes (M = 4.22), being laughed at by their peers (M = 4.17), and feeling anxious when unexpectedly called on by the teacher (M = 4.10). They also reported difficulty in understanding spoken English (M = 4.05) and experiencing physical symptoms of anxiety, like a racing heart when called on (M = 4.01). These findings support previous research that highlights fear of negative evaluation and communication apprehension as key factors in language learning anxiety. Such worries can hold students back from participating and lower their confidence, which ultimately makes it harder for them to learn a new language.

Qualitative Analysis-Experiences and Perceived Sources of Anxiety

The semi-structured interviews were carefully transcribed and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework, with NVivo software helping to organize the coding and develop themes systematically. We reached data saturation after conducting 12 interviews with male EFL learners from the English Department at Paktika Institute of Higher Education, which included a mix of undergraduate students with different anxiety levels. From this analysis, five major themes emerged, highlighting the complex nature of English language learning anxiety among Afghan male EFL learners. Each theme is backed up by meaningful quotes from the participants.

Theme 1: Fear of Negative Evaluation

Fear of negative evaluation has become a common source of anxiety for all the participants involved. Many shared their concerns about making mistakes and facing judgment from their peers or instructors. One participant mentioned, "I'm always worried my classmates will laugh if I mispronounce something." Another voiced his fear that making errors while speaking would make others think he wasn't "good enough." Similarly, a student admitted feeling embarrassed when he stumbled over his words in front of the class. These experiences highlight how the fear of being ridiculed by peers and facing social judgment can really hold students back from engaging in oral activities, emphasizing just how central this theme is to their anxiety.

Theme 2: Communication Apprehension

Communication apprehension comes with a mix of psychological and physical symptoms, especially during English speaking tasks. Many participants shared their struggles, like experiencing mental blocks where they forget even the simplest words or their minds just go blank while speaking. For example, one student mentioned, "When I speak in English, I forget simple words and my mind goes blank." Another participant talked about the physical side of things, saying that his "heart races and hands sweat" whenever he's called on in class. Others felt so anxious that they couldn't put sentences together properly. These stories really show the strong mental and physical reactions that come with anxiety about speaking, which can seriously hinder learners' ability to express themselves.

Theme 3: Limited Exposure and Practice

A common worry among students was the lack of chances to practice English outside of class, which added to their anxiety and self-doubt. One BA student shared, "We only speak English in the classroom, so I feel nervous when I try to use it." Another participant pointed out

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the lack of English-speaking settings beyond school, saying, "There is no environment outside school where I can practice speaking English." This absence of daily practice was echoed in a student's remark that, since he didn't use English regularly, he struggled to express himself fluently. These insights highlight how the surrounding context limits language use and heightens anxiety.

Theme 4: Teacher and Peer Influence

The way teachers and peers interact can really impact students' anxiety levels. Supportive and encouraging teachers tend to ease anxiety, while criticism can make it worse. One student shared, "If the teacher is kind and helps us, I feel less anxious." On the flip side, a BA student mentioned that when classmates laughed or criticized him, it made him more nervous and he often avoided speaking up. Another participant pointed out how motivating positive feedback from peers can be, as it encourages more participation. These observations highlight just how important classroom dynamics are in either reducing or increasing students' anxiety.

Theme 5: Test and Performance Anxiety

Oral exams and presentations are often seen as particularly nerve-wracking experiences. One BA student described oral tests as "the worst" because he felt like "everyone is watching and judging me." Another participant admitted that the thought of presenting made him extremely anxious, mainly due to the fear of making mistakes. Additionally, a student mentioned that his nervousness during exams hindered his ability to think clearly. These accounts highlight the intense pressure and evaluative nature of performance assessments, which can significantly heighten anxiety among students.

Table 4. Frequency of Major Themes in Interview Data (N = 12)

Theme	F (n)	P (%)	Representative Quotations (abridged)
Fear of Negative Evaluation	12	100%	"Afraid classmates will laugh at me."
Communication Apprehension	11	91.7%	"Mind goes blank when I speak."
Limited Exposure and Practice	10	83.3%	"Only speak English in class, so I feel nervous."
Teacher and Peer Influence	9	75.0%	"Kind teacher helps, criticism increases anxiety."
Test and Performance Anxiety	8	66.7%	"Oral tests are the worst."

The qualitative findings shed light on the various sources and experiences of English language learning anxiety faced by male Afghan EFL learners. A key theme that emerged was the Fear of Negative Evaluation, which all participants noted, emphasizing their worries about how peers might judge them and the social fallout from making mistakes. This observation is consistent with the quantitative data, which showed high scores on items related to this fear. Additionally, Communication Apprehension was notably common, with almost all participants reporting physical symptoms like a racing heartbeat and sweating, along with cognitive issues such as mental blankness during speaking tasks. This aligns with the FLCAS item analysis, where feelings of nervousness while speaking were particularly pronounced.

The theme of Limited Exposure and Practice highlights the unique challenges that learners in Afghanistan face, especially since English is rarely used outside the classroom. This lack of real-world practice can lead to low confidence and heightened anxiety when it comes to speaking. The way teachers and peers interact plays a big role in shaping these anxiety levels. Supportive interactions can help ease anxiety, while criticism tends to make it worse, which really emphasizes how crucial a positive classroom environment is. This suggests that investing in teacher training and peer support programs could be beneficial. Additionally, Test and Performance Anxiety stands out as a major source of stress, particularly during oral exams and presentations. This really shows how the pressure of assessments can affect students' anxiety levels.

Discussions: In this study, we took a closer look at how common, intense, and what causes English language learning anxiety among students in the English Department at Paktika Institute of Higher Education. The results show that a large number of students deal with moderate to high levels of anxiety, with notable differences among groups and a variety of perceived reasons behind it. These findings not only support but also build on the existing research about EFL anxiety, especially in the unique sociocultural setting of Afghanistan. The data reveals that almost 70% of students reported feeling moderate anxiety, while more than 20% faced high anxiety levels. This aligns with other studies in similar EFL environments, like those by Bakhtyari and Kassim (2022) in Afghanistan and Alnahidh and Altalhab (2020) in Saudi Arabia, both highlighting high rates of language anxiety among university students. The average FLCAS score in our study (M = 109.6) closely resembles those found in similar research in the area (Bakhtyari & Kassim, 2022; Anwari, 2019), indicating that English language anxiety is a widespread and ongoing issue for Afghan EFL learners.

The prevalence noted in this study is actually a bit higher than what we've seen in research from more affluent or urban areas (Piechurska-Kuciel, 2012; Çağatay, 2015). This difference could be due to the limited opportunities for English exposure outside the classroom, a lack of supportive language environments, and the sociopolitical challenges in Afghanistan (Ahmad et al., 2018). Additionally, the observation certain group of students reported significantly higher levels of anxiety than others aligns with findings from Ezzi (2012) and Karatas et al. (2016), which identified social and cultural factors as a key influences on language anxiety within EFL contexts. These differences might stem from sociocultural expectations and varying beliefs in self-efficacy, as noted by Tahsildar and Kabiri (2019). The qualitative insights from this study not only support but also expand on the quantitative data by pinpointing fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, limited English exposure, and the dynamics with teachers and peers as the main sources of anxiety. These themes are well-established in the literature (Horwitz et al., 1986; Kayaoğlu & Sağlamel, 2013; Wardhani, 2019), and their presence in the Afghan context highlights their relevance across EFL learning environments. Interestingly, fear of negative evaluation and communication apprehension were the most commonly mentioned issues, which aligns with the fundamental concepts identified by Horwitz et al. (1986) and is further backed by studies in Turkey (Çağatay, 2015), China (Liu, 2018), and Pakistan (Bhatti & Memon, 2016).

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It is fascinating to see how the theme of limited exposure and practice really stood out in this study, especially considering the unique challenges that Afghan students face. While similar problems have been noted in rural or under-resourced areas (Piechurska-Kuciel, 2012), the situation in Afghanistan seems to amplify these issues due to ongoing sociopolitical constraints and a lack of access to English media and interaction (Ahmad et al., 2018; Anwari, 2019). This insight is crucial because it underscores the necessity for interventions that are specifically tailored to the context, addressing not just classroom practices but also the wider institutional and societal factors at play. Additionally, the influence of teachers and peers was significant in shaping students' experiences of anxiety. Supportive teachers and a collaborative classroom atmosphere helped reduce anxiety, while critical or unsupported peers tended to make it worse. This aligns with the findings of Azizpour and Gholami (2022) and Hashemi and Abbasi (2013), who highlighted the vital role of emotional support and a positive classroom climate in alleviating language anxiety.

The study highlights the negative effects of language anxiety on students' participation in class and their language performance, a finding that aligns with previous research (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Woodrow, 2006; Ran et al., 2022). Students reported experiencing avoidance behaviors, mental blocks, and even physical symptoms when faced with speaking tasks, all of which can seriously impede effective language learning. This aligns with the work of Liu (2018) and Luo (2013), who noted that higher anxiety levels often correlate with lower oral proficiency and a decreased willingness to communicate. However, there are some differing viewpoints in the literature. For instance, Majali (2020) and Dewey et al. (2018) argue that a certain level of anxiety can actually serve as a motivator and may improve performance if managed well. While this study didn't uncover any evidence of "positive anxiety" among the participants, it's worth considering that individual differences in coping strategies and self-efficacy might influence how anxiety affects performance (Tahsildar & Kabiri, 2019; Tianjian, 2010). Future research could delve deeper into this relationship, especially within the Afghan context.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to dive into the prevalence, intensity, and sources of English language learning anxiety among students in the English Department at Paktika Institute of Higher Education. The findings showed that a significant number of students deal with moderate to high levels of anxiety when it comes to using English, especially in speaking and classroom interactions. The results also pointed out some interesting differences related to academic background and levels of study, with those at earlier stages of their education often experiencing higher level of anxiety .Qualitative insights shed light on key factors contributing to this anxiety, such as the fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, limited exposure to English, and the impact of teachers and peers. These findings carry important implications for educators and institutional policymakers. It's clear that language anxiety isn't just a personal hurdle; it's a systemic issue that can affect students' participation, confidence, and overall language growth. Therefore, it's crucial for teachers to create a supportive and inclusive classroom environment. This can be done through positive reinforcement, flexible error correction, encouraging peer collaboration, and fostering a non-judgmental atmosphere where mistakes are seen as chances to learn rather than failures.

At the institutional level, there's a real need to create more chances for genuine English communication outside of the classroom. Setting up English clubs, conversation circles, and peer mentoring programs can give students practical ways to use the language in relaxed environments. These initiatives can help students gradually gain confidence, ease their anxiety, and foster a more positive attitude toward learning English. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of focusing on groups that might struggle more with language anxiety, like those in the early stages of their academic journeys or with less prior exposure to language learning. .Providing tailored support services, such as counseling, workshops on coping strategies, and specific language assistance, can significantly enhance these students' experiences. For future research, it would be beneficial to conduct similar studies in different regions and across various academic fields to better understand language anxiety in diverse settings. Longitudinal studies could also shed light on how anxiety levels evolve over time and in response to targeted interventions.

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