

**Anxiety in Reading and Speaking English as a Foreign Language**

**Ms. Buvaneshwari R**

*MA English, REVA University, Bangalore (Karnataka) India*

**Ms. Vijayalakshmi Sam**

*Assistant Professor, REVA University, Bangalore (Karnataka) India*

**Abstract**

In India English is taught as a second language. However when students move from schools to colleges, where the medium of Instruction is only in English, the students are bound to anxiety while Reading and Speaking. This study was conducted to investigate the anxiety levels of students in a private university where English is the medium of Instruction. The study is an action research which involved undergraduate students through group discussion and questionnaire survey. The findings of the study revealed that student had a moderate level of anxiety. With innovative teaching methods and activity based teaching, the learners worked on the limitations and equipped themselves to become better learners.

**Key Words** - Anxiety, Reading, Speaking, Activity based Teaching

**Introduction**

Anxiety in general mental health diagnoses that lead to excessive nervousness, fear, apprehension, and worry. Foreign language anxiety experienced in learning or using a second language or foreign language context whether it is associated with the productive skills of speaking and writing or the receptive skills of reading and listening. Both listening and speaking are regularly mentioned as the most anxiety arousing of foreign language activities. Foreign language anxiety is usually seen in language learning classroom. Anxiety has been considered as one of the most important affective factors that influence second language learning Na, (pp. 22-34).

Language Anxiety, a type of anxiety specifically associated with learning the second language (L2), can arise from many kinds of sources Kehan, Young, (pp.426-439). Language classroom

naturally becomes anxiety-causing situation for some language learners because of the periodic evaluation of learners' performance and competence. Horwitz (pp.24) and Horwitz et al. have assigned the inconclusive outcomes of preceding research to the lack of a reliable and valid measure of anxiety specific to language learning. They conceptualize foreign language anxiety as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning origins from the uniqueness of the language learning processes (pp. 25: 31)." Horwitz et al. desegregated three related anxieties to their formulation of foreign language anxiety, i.e., communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation.

Anxiety has been found to interfere with several situations but when it comes to foreign language it is known as foreign language anxiety. Language anxiety has

great influence over foreign language learners. A distinction can be made between various types of anxiety as such trait anxiety, state anxiety, situation specific anxiety. Those who can perceive situations as being threatening are said to have state anxiety, a social type of anxiety that occurs under certain condition. Situation specific anxiety is caused by specific situation or event such as public speaking and examinations. In general anxiety can be defined as an unpleasant feeling accompanied by a premonition that something desirable is about to happen. Anxiety, stated briefly, is the signal danger, which mobilize the human resources at all levels of functioning in the interests of conservation, defence and self-preservation. At all levels of anxiety, there are various combinations in degree of loss of homeostatic control and attempts to mastery to regain control.

### **Background of the study**

Research in the area has already made great contributions in understanding the relationship between the language learning and language anxiety. But still research in this area is limited and we still need to understand the language anxiety in depth to reduce negative influence among language learners causing by language anxiety. The research in this area focused to broaden the understanding on language anxiety in respect with reading and speaking skill which language learners face in everyday classroom situation. Anxious students are those learners who demonstrate lack of learning strategies, lack of self-confidence, experience and skills. Their problems in language learning may be compounded with negative thoughts that language learners show towards learning a second language. When

students were asked to read or speak in English many of the learners think often about the negative aspects of the task than the positive ones. Language classrooms shouldn't be always thought of ideal environment that are free of any kinds of learning anxiety.

Speaking anxiety is one of the learners affecting factors that carry many difficulties to the learners in learning to speak a second/foreign language. As a result, teaching becomes a challenging job. It is primarily because, on the one hand, the organization asks teachers to teach speaking skills and make learners capable in speaking; on the other hand, due to the language speaking anxiety, learners do not take part in the speaking events in the classes. Hence, to make teaching learning course effective in terms of speaking, it is very significant to study the problem of language speaking anxiety in the ESL classroom. Speaking anxiety is a unique construct in language learning that obstructs learners' language learning process and makes them pessimistic about their language achievements. Reading is also issue to changeability within the affective domain. Reading Anxiety, it means having anxiety (feeling of nervousness, uneasiness, fear and worry) towards reading. A score on reading anxiety scale with five situations viz; silent reading in the class, reading aloud in the class, group reading in the class, reading in the family, reading alone in the leisure time (developed by the investigator for this study) was the measure of reading anxiety. When second language readers read second language texts, they are trying to decode the unfamiliar text, design of the text and cultural difference. But when they encounter difficulty in understanding and

processing them, students may get frustrated and experience anxiety. It is not only affecting the reading skill, but it has the major impact on whole process of language learning.

### **Significance of the study**

The research is considerable value because it provides to the society and especially to the teachers and students what strategy and theories should be used in reducing anxiety in learning the second language especially in reading and speaking. The research will shed light on the role of teachers and students to understand the influence of anxiety in their learning processes and helps them to overcome it. The teacher should play a role of motivator to the students to achieve their performance in the reading and speaking. Motivation becomes key factor to reduce the anxiety among the students. And, the pressure from the parents on the students' academic achievement should be avoided to reduce the anxiety issue.

### **Research Objectives**

- To study the cause and effect of Anxiety among students in reading and speaking English Language.
- To analyse the level of improvements in the students using innovative approaches.
- To explore the relationship between anxiety and academic performance in undergraduate education.

### **Research Gap**

- Language anxiety as a negative emotional state.
- Negative impact on how to learn target language.

- Sense of reading effect among the students which is influenced by their peer group and teacher's attitude.
- The emotional and psychological reasons for difficulties in introducing a more communicative approach in classroom.

### **Factors that affect Reading**

Reading is the cognitive process of decoding symbols to derive meaning. It is a form of language processing. Success in this process of reading is considered as reading comprehension. Reading is a means for language acquisition, communication, and ideas. The symbols are typically visual but may be concrete. Reading is a complex interaction between text and the reader, and it's shaped by the reader's prior knowledge about what they are reading, experiences, attitude, and the language community which is culturally and socially situated. This process happens mostly with individual person and it's a form of intrapersonal communication.

A student's reading ability can be affected by many factors including background of the knowledge, ability, home environment, school experiences and interest level. However, reading performance is most rightly related to a student's success with five early literacy skills- phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. By understanding and nurturing these five fundamental skills, parents and teachers can better encourage the student's successful reading performance. Phonemic awareness means having the ability to hear and orally use each sound that makes words. This skill is entirely oral, no written language. Students who have strong phonemic awareness are better

ready to sound out words while reading and more likely to become fluent, talented readers. Alphabetic principle encompasses memorizing of letters, and an understanding that individual letters are made words and the ability to connect sounds with letters in print. And fluency involves the accuracy and speed of a student's reading. A fluent reader can read text correctly, quickly, and with appropriate voice tone. Gaining fluency gives pleasurable reading and stress free for students. Vocabulary involves in understanding and grasping the meaning of the words while reading. A student cannot comprehend and construct the text without understanding the meaning from the text. A student with more vocabulary knowledge can read the text more fluently and read with the purpose. Comprehension involves in constructing meaning from what is being read. Without comprehension the reading does not have any purpose. To comprehend the text, a reader must actively and intentionally think and analyse meaning while reading. To have good comprehension the reader required to have other fundamental literacy skills.

#### **Factors that affect speaking skills:**

Speaking is one of the most important and essential skills that must be practiced communicating orally. People who can speak fluently will be good in sending and receiving information or message to another. Speaking consist of verbal and non-verbal symbol which helps to share and build the meaning in the various contexts. Speaking is the process producing, receiving, processing information, it is an interactive process of constructing meaning. The form and meaning of the speaking are depending on

the situation in which it occurs, with the participants themselves, their experiences, the physical environment, and the purposes for speaking. There are several factors that affect speaking skill lack of subject matter, improper listening skills, lack of proper vocabulary, strong and quick learners, lack of proper orientation. One common problem seen in the learners is that they think that they have nothing to say on a topic. Learners may be bored or feel that the subject is unrelated to anything they know. If this is case, they will not be motivated to speak other than the fact that they should be participating in it actively. Lack of motivation another reason for hindering the learners in active participation in speaking. And another problem is lack of vocabulary when language learners don't have enough vocabulary knowledge that stops them to communicate properly because they will be searching for appropriate vocabulary in their mind.

According to Horwitz (pp. 21: 112-126), this anxiety derives from the inherent in authenticity associated with immature foreign language communicative abilities: Adults naturally see themselves as sensibly intelligent, socially-adept individuals, complex to different socio- cultural values. These expectations are rarely confronted when communicating in mother tongue as it is not difficult to understand others or to make oneself tacit. However, the situation stands contrast when learners learn foreign language. Person's communication attempts will be assessed according to uncertain or even unknown linguistic and socio- cultural standards, second language communication entails risk-taking and is essentially problematic. Because complex and nonspontaneous mental operations are

compulsory in order to communicate at all, any performance in the second language is likely to test an individual's self-concept as a competent communicator and lead to reticence, self-consciousness, fear, or even panic (pp:133).

Many scholars and researchers have found that foreign language Anxiety can have negative influence on learner's speaking ability. If we see, Onwuegbuzie, et. al. argued that the existence of foreign language anxiety can affective negatively the influence of learners' speech and learning in a general sense. Young in (pp. 539-553) investigated the students' perspective on anxiety and speaking. The result of the study was indicated that speaking in foreign language was not exclusively the source of student anxiety, but in speaking in front of the class.

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this research was to look more specifically on how anxiety affects the second language acquisition of student's age group between 18-20. Students may begin learning a second language much earlier than their degree some in fact, will begin learning a second language before they begin to walk, however, for the purposes of this study, the researcher focused only on second language acquisition at degree students. After reviewing the literature and looking at previous research, the researcher decided to develop a questionnaire for collecting quantitative data from the participants. First, several items were developed and written down basing the research objectives.

The purpose of the study was to investigate the influence of Anxiety in Second Language Learning classroom.

The study was conducted on total 60 undergraduate students in a University. To know the different levels of anxiety among the particular age group and the strategies used to diminish the influence of anxiety among the students. This study also helps us to understand how far the effect of anxiety has decreased among the learners as already so many researches has done on the same subject. And, the participants were selected from the university which is in the urban area so that students would have been exposed to the English language, though students were from different places, inside the college campus they were taught in English. So, they had knowledge of speaking and reading skills in English.

The data was collected in the form of questionnaire comprised of 10 questions and the secondary materials used for data analysis included journals on the anxiety and its influence in language learning both in the print and internet. And this helped the researcher to form the questionnaire in a right context. Before distributing the questionnaire, the prior permission was taken from the class teacher and from the students. The questions were clearly explained to all the students to avoid the misinterpretation so that the study will be fruitful and genuine.

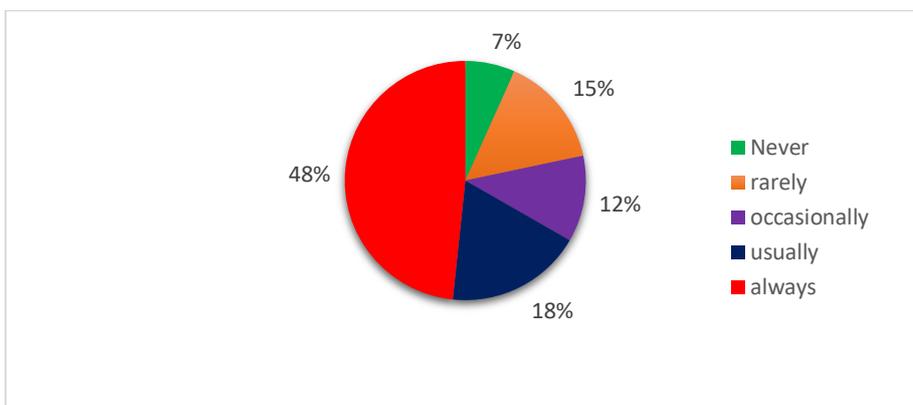
### **Data Analysis and Findings**

The questionnaires were framed to investigate the influence of anxiety in language learning especially in terms of reading and speaking skills. The questionnaire was prepared in such a way to understand the student's interest towards reading and speaking skills. The purpose of the survey is to know the level of anxiety students are facing in language

class. Data collection was in the form of a questionnaire comprising of 10 questions. The first five questions were framed in order to understand the influence of anxiety in student's speaking skill and the last five questions were based on reading skill and the effect of anxiety in reading skill among the students in second language class.

The collected samples had been analysed and exhibited in the form of charts to

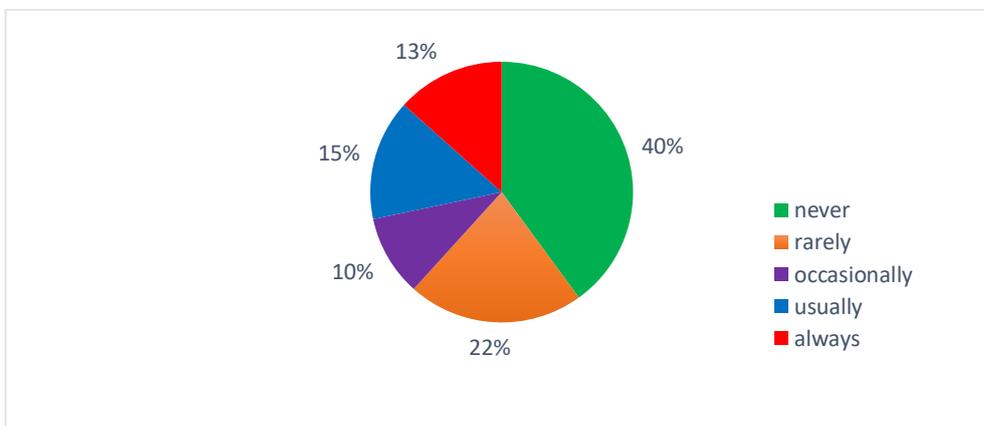
I would feel more confident about speaking in English if my Teacher motivates me.



According to the survey that was done on 60 students, in which 48% of the students always felt more confident in the classrooms if their teacher motivates them. And 18% students stated that they usually felt confident if their teacher motivates them, on the other side 12% of the students I feel better if I am not corrected in all the classes.

understand the various perspectives of the students towards each question that was framed for the research. The research shows a different variation in the mind of the students towards the impact of anxiety in the reading and speaking skills of second language learning process. The analysis made on the student's level of understanding and answering the questions.

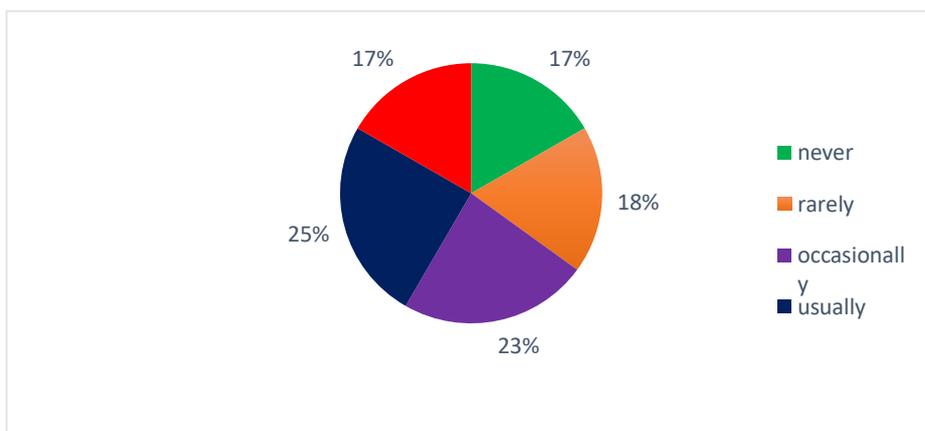
occasionally used to become confident with motivation. 15% students marked that they felt confident rarely but not always. And 7% of students clearly mentioned that they never felt confident by their teachers' motivation.



According to the survey that was done with 60 students, 40% of the students thought that they never felt better if they were not corrected in all the class. It shows that they wanted immediate feedback and correction from the teacher 22% of the sample population mentioned that rarely they felt better if they were not corrected

in all the classes, and 15% of them stated that they usually felt better if they were not corrected in all the classes. And 13% of the sample population clearly exclaimed that they always felt better if they were not corrected in all the classes, on other side 10% of the students told that they occasionally felt better if they were not corrected in all the classes.

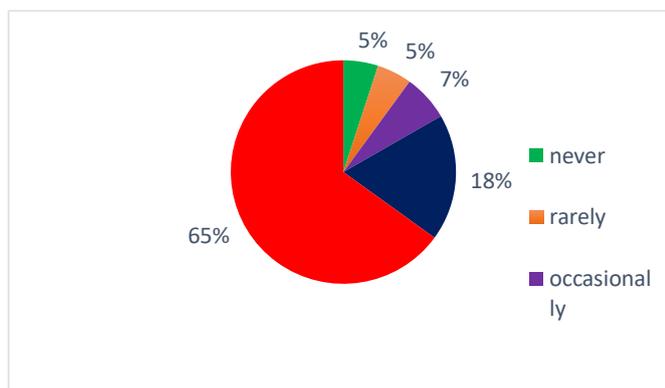
I feel negative when I am not able to understand what I am reading.



According to the survey 25% of the students were usually felt negative while reading if they were not able to understand what they were reading. Because if students can't understand what they were reading that reading becomes meaningless. And 23% of the students were occasionally felt negative if they were not able to understand what they were reading. 18%

of the students rarely felt negative if they were not able to understand what they were reading and 17% of the students mentioned they always felt negative if they were not able to understand what they were reading, on other side 17% of the students stated that they never felt negative even if they were not able understand what they were reading.

I enjoy reading English



According to the survey 65% of the students expressed that they always enjoyed reading English it shows their interest on reading English. 18% of the students usually enjoyed reading English but not always. 7% of the sample population marked that they occasionally enjoyed reading English and 5% of the students mentioned they rarely liked reading English. And 5% of the students stated that they never enjoyed reading English, because they felt reading English was difficult and English is a foreign language, students wouldn't be used to English language like their First language.

### **Findings and Conclusion:**

The study has provided deep understanding of adult student's perception on Anxiety in reading and speaking in English as a Second language, and the ratio of the level anxiety among the English Second language learners. After the interpretation and analysis of all the collected data the findings of this research have been taken into consideration. In the results students have shown the three factors for causing anxiety as Horwitz et al. mentioned which is communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety.

The study has revealed that students are more worried about the negative evaluation and social anxiety. Krashen's affective filter hypothesis has a major impact on the second language learning. Through this study it has been found that the students felt less anxious when their teacher motivated them. Majority of the sample population stated that they felt less anxious when their teacher motivated them, Krashen in his theory of affective filter hypothesis said that lack of

motivation also can be the affective factor which has negative influence in second language acquisition. The affective filter arises (lack of motivation, lack of self-confidence, anxiety) in the mind of the students when they take part in classroom events and it will block the mind of the students from performing the activity. If there is lack of motivation automatically the problem of anxiety arises among the students, as students stated that they feel less anxious if their teacher motivates them.

Though students have shown different results as an individual, finally the research has revealed that the students with more anxious includes worry, tension failed to show their better progress in terms of language learning. And the role of anxiety in English language learning still exists among the language learners especially with the students who learns second language in their adult or teenage they face more problems in learning the second language. Because at the time of adulthood they are already more matured and well acquainted in their mother language. The matured students are more worried about their prestige, society and peer groups commonly they are worried about other views on them, because as a learner while learning a new language it's very common to make errors. The learners are more worried that what others will think if they make any mistake while speaking or reading in English.

### **Strategies to Prevent Anxiety in Second Language classroom**

- The influence of anxiety has its negative impact in second language learning and all the learners experience anxiety in different

situations. It's essential to find a way to manage the anxiety as it affects the language learning process.

- Educate the learners about Anxiety and its effects in learning process.
- Provide an open- communication classroom where learners can speak freely and explain their difficulties in learning.
- Teach the positive anxiety coping skills with students and discuss with students.
- Allow the students to practice the coping strategies and apply it in the context of learning process.
- Praise the students for their use of positive coping skills which will reduce the students fear, worry, tension. For example, allow the students to use stress balls during class or listen to music while taking positive coping skills which will make the student's mind stress free.
- To find out anxiety problem in students the teacher must listen to the students, especially in the context of reading anxiety when the student expresses the such words like 'I can't do this' the teacher can understand that student wants help.
- To avoid the reading and speaking anxiety there are simple things that teachers can do in the classrooms, take a few minutes everyday class and teach the students how to unwind and distress throughout the day. Integrating simple deep breathing exercises and stretching in between lessons will help to reduce the stress and tension.

Through this research it has found that students felt more comfortable and less anxious when their teacher motivates

them. Motivation helps the students to overcome the anxiety. So, it is the role of the teacher to motivate the students in the classroom whenever students fail to perform in the class. Analysing the students work and having interpersonal talk with the students will help the teachers to know their student's strength and weakness. One of the important theorists Krashen in his theory of Affective Filter hypothesis mentioned that low motivation will stop the mind of the students from performing, so it's very much important to motivate the student's not just in one class. Motivate the students often and teacher must show that she/he is listening to the students when they are performing some activity in the class.

In the second language Classroom teacher must follow some strategies to reduce the students' anxiety level specifically in term of reading and speaking skill.

- Motivate the students to reduce their stress and anxiety in second language classroom.
- Provide indirect corrections instead of direct corrections.
- Create opportunities to the students to speak up in the target language.
- Make the students to know about the issue of anxiety and its effect on second language.
- Use your creativity and technical tools to teach language which will make the students to feel freer and it helps to reduce anxiety.
- Present positive vibrations in the class by showing you care for each one of the students.

The problem of anxiety arouses from the student's mind, as its origins from the students it will be very easy for the

students to understand the anxiety problem and they themselves will be able to manage the anxiety by using simple steps. Whenever students were asked to perform in second language in the classroom, they may feel depressed and worried. That point of time students must make sure that they take deep breath which will help to reduce the stress and depression. The students must do self-motivation which will increase their self-confidence and that will reduce the anxiety.

Students must do more practice which will help them increase their performance and it will also help students to increase their confidence level. The level of interest that language learners have on the target language matters a lot in terms of reducing anxiety. Because if the learners are not interested in then particular in learning the language then students won't be able to perform well in the class and they won't pay attention in the class. Teacher have to create the interest among the students by using their creativity and using technology in teaching, students won't pay attention if you just teach only using text. When teachers use video, audio and different classroom setup will reduce anxiety among the students.

Provide indirect correction avoid direct correction. Because most of the students didn't like to be corrected in front of everyone and this can undermine students'

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confidence and discourages the students who have anxiety in making mistakes in second language. Don't correct the students while their speaking which will demotivate the students to perform in the class and creates fear among the students. Praise the students for their improvement in the learning process, acknowledge the students if they do something better which will encourage and motivate other students. Teacher must focus on each student and teacher must express to the students that they care for them which will make them feel more comfortable. Teacher shouldn't expect all the students to perform with same ability that may create disinterest among the students. Students will be tensed thinking that what teacher will feel if they are not able to fulfil the teacher's expectation. Out of this study that was done on adult students to know the effect of anxiety in reading and speaking English as a foreign language, it was found that students have the issue of anxiety while reading and speaking English. Anxiety affects majorly students and stops them from acquiring and learning second language, and its negative influence which blocks the students mind from performing in second language. In the classroom teacher must take the responsibility to reduce the anxiety, each one of the students should be given importance by the teacher.

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