Anxiety in EFL Classrooms: Impact on Linguistic Proficiency and Skill Development

Samjhana Aryal,
Jnanu Raj Paudel, PhD

Abstract

English is a vital medium for education and communication in Nepal, making its acquisition crucial for academic and professional success. However, the process of learning English as a foreign language (EFL) often induces significant anxiety among students, which can hinder their language development and overall performance. This study explores the anxiety levels of secondary-level EFL students in Nepal as they acquire language skills in EFL classrooms. Sixty students from three community schools were selected, and data were collected using a Google Forms questionnaire based on the descriptive approach. The findings reveal varying levels of anxiety across different language skills, with speaking skills eliciting the highest anxiety, followed by writing, listening, and reading skills, which caused moderate anxiety. Contextual disparities were also noted, with test and exam-related anxiety being the most significant. Additionally, nervousness and students' proficiency levels emerged as primary contributors to their anxiety. The study highlights the necessity of implementing comprehensive, context-specific strategies in English language classrooms to address the diverse and intense forms of student anxiety, ultimately promoting more effective language learning and the need for targeted interventions in EFL classrooms to reduce anxiety and enhance students' language learning outcomes.

Keywords: Language anxiety, secondary level, language skills, proficiency, EFL classroom

Introduction

The acquisition of a second language is a complex and multifaceted process influenced by various psychological, cognitive, and affective factors. Among these factors, language anxiety has emerged as a significant construct that can profoundly impact the language learning experience (Horwitz et.al., 1986). Defined as the feeling of tension, apprehension, and nervousness associated with the use of a second or foreign language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994), language anxiety has been extensively studied in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

Linguistic proficiency, a multidimensional construct encompassing various language skills such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking, is crucial for effective communication and academic success in an EFL setting (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). As EFL learners strive to achieve proficiency,

anxiety can potentially hinder their progress, leading to avoidance behaviors, decreased motivation, and impaired performance (Horwitz et al., 1986). Consequently, understanding the relationship between language anxiety and linguistic proficiency is paramount for developing effective strategies to support EFL learners in overcoming their anxieties and optimizing their language learning outcomes.

Language anxiety, a psychological concept characterized by feelings of tension and apprehension in the context of foreign language learning, has been identified as a crucial factor influencing language acquisition. Among learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), this anxiety may present in various forms, such as communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test-related stress (Horwitz et al., 1986). These challenges can impede the development of linguistic proficiency, which involves both comprehension and language production skills (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). While numerous studies have investigated the relationship between language anxiety and proficiency, findings have been inconclusive (Marcos-Llinás & Garau, 2009; Shao et al., 2013). Consequently, further research is necessary to explore this dynamic in greater depth, offering insights into its impact on EFL learners' language acquisition process.

Foreign Language Anxiety

When we hear the word 'anxiety,' we might associate it with feelings described by its synonyms, such as 'nervousness,' 'worry,' or 'unease.' The British Psychological Society (2019, p. 45) defines the anxiety as a sensation that "...usually manifests itself as a feeling of profound agitation and unease about an imminent unpleasant experience..." that can occur with such physical symptoms as an increased heart rate, hyperventilation, dizziness, nausea, hot flushes, increased perspiration, shaking and palpitations (Anxiety UK, 2018).

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) has been studied fairly regularly since it was more comprehensively surmised in 1986 by Horwitz and Cope. They identified FLA as essentially the same as any specific anxiety. Students experience apprehension, worry, and even dread. They have difficulty concentrating, become forgetful, sweat, and have palpitations. They exhibit avoidance behaviour such as missing class and postponing homework. They furthered the analysis of the condition, however, by asserting that where the phenomenon had once been thought of as some combination of communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation, it is actually "...a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process." (Howitz & Cope,1986, pp.127-128).

Second/foreign language anxiety is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon (Young, 1991) and can be defined as "a subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system" (McIntyre & Gardner, 1994, p. 125). It has been found that the feelings of tension or nervousness centre on the two basic task requirements of foreign language learning: listening and speaking (Horwitz et al., 1986) because, in interaction, both skills cannot be separated. A further detailed investigation of these factors could potentially assist language teachers to alleviate anxiety in the classroom setting and to make the classroom environment less anxiety-provoking and hence to improve learners' performance in the target language.

The intricate nature of language anxiety, shaped by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors, highlights the complex interaction of psychological, social, and linguistic dimensions. This study further investigates these factors in depth, specifically examining whether learners experience anxiety in the EFL classroom setting and identifying the strategies they employ to overcome this anxiety. By exploring these aspects, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of language anxiety in EFL contexts and inform the development of more effective interventions to support learners. We are

guided by the overarching questions, like what kinds of language anxiety the EFL students face and what strategies they employ to overcome the anxiety of the foreign language.

Literature Review

Literature review of the present study contains the theoretical context of the study, linguistic anxiety concerning the four language skills, some previous related studies, and the research gap.

Theoretical Context of the Study

Several emotive aspects can be observed in EFL learning, and these emotional factors significantly influence the language acquisition process of EFL learners. These factors primarily include cognitive abilities, motivation, attitude, anxiety, and other psychological elements. Among these, anxiety is recognized as a critical factor that can hinder effective EFL learning (Horwitz et al., 1986). Anxiety in foreign language acquisition has been identified as one of the key affective variables impacting EFL learning and communication with others. Moreover, it is regarded as a dynamic and evolving area of research within the broader field of applied linguistics.

Language learning anxiety encompasses feelings of nervousness, fear, and negativity, which are closely associated with the process of acquiring and using a foreign language. EFL learners often experience reduced self-confidence, uncertainty, and concerns about failure. The effective implementation of appropriate instructional strategies by EFL teachers can play a crucial role in alleviating learners' anxiety. Language anxiety can be categorized into three primary types. First, communication anxiety arises when learners engage in speaking and listening activities. Second, test anxiety is associated with performance-related stress, often stemming from the fear of poor academic outcomes. Lastly, fear of negative evaluation pertains to learners' concerns that their linguistic abilities may be perceived unfavorably by teachers, peers, or other individuals (Anxiety UK, 2018). These three forms of anxiety contribute to heightened levels of stress among EFL learners.

In Nepali EFL classrooms, the impact of foreign language anxiety is particularly evident, as it negatively affects students' self-confidence and self-assurance. Furthermore, it is apparent that linguistic anxiety adversely influences all four language skills and hinders overall language proficiency.

Anxiety in Language Skills

Language learning anxiety significantly affects both productive and receptive skills, hindering effective communication and comprehension in EFL learners. Productive skills, which include speaking and writing, play a crucial role in conveying information and ideas. However, anxiety often disrupts these processes. Horwitz et al. (1986) noted that speaking difficulties are commonly observed among second-language learners, particularly in academic settings such as university counseling meetings. In EFL classrooms, students frequently struggle with hesitation, nervousness, and fear of making mistakes when speaking. Many feel intimidated when asking questions or participating in discussions, a phenomenon particularly evident in Nepalese classrooms, where instructional methods can contribute to heightened anxiety and diminished speaking performance. Similarly, writing in a second language is often perceived as a daunting task, exacerbated by anxiety linked to an individual's tendency to engage with or avoid writing assignments. Writing apprehension can be mitigated by fostering confidence, improving self-expression, and enhancing idea flow. However, in the Nepali context, writing is often overlooked and primarily reserved for assignments and final examinations, limiting students' opportunities to develop this skill.

Receptive skills, including listening and reading, are also affected by language anxiety. Listening comprehension anxiety arises when EFL learners struggle to grasp the precise meaning of spoken discourse. Factors such as pronunciation variations, unfamiliar vocabulary, complex grammar structures, and unfamiliar topics further intensify this anxiety (Vogely, 1998). EFL students often experience nervousness during listening activities, sometimes requiring multiple attempts to understand and process spoken input. However, structured listening practice is rarely incorporated into Nepalese educational settings. Similarly, reading anxiety in a second language stems from difficulties with unfamiliar script systems, writing styles, and educational contexts. Learners may struggle to comprehend texts due to a lack of exposure to writing conventions and insufficient background knowledge. Even when students can decode written language, a limited understanding of text structures and content can heighten their anxiety, ultimately hindering their reading proficiency.

Review of the Previous Studies

Research on foreign language anxiety has been a significant area of study within the field of second language acquisition, with scholars examining its causes, effects, and possible pedagogical interventions. Various empirical studies have been conducted across different contexts, aiming to understand how anxiety influences English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' proficiency in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. This review synthesizes previous research on language anxiety, particularly in the Nepalese context, alongside relevant international studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

K.C. (2010) conducted a study on anxiety among EFL learners, primarily investigating the causes and sources of FLA. The findings revealed that the participants did not exhibit a moderate level of anxiety but rather experienced high anxiety levels. The primary sources of anxiety included test anxiety, self-concept issues, over-competitiveness, peer pressure, teacher influence, pedagogical methods, pathological and cognitive factors, and academic challenges. These factors collectively contributed to foreign language anxiety among more than 80% of the surveyed EFL learners. The study underscored the necessity for instructional interventions that mitigate these sources of anxiety to facilitate better learning outcomes.

Similarly, Lamichhane (2019) explored English language anxiety among eighth-grade students in government schools in the Chitwan district of Nepal. The research aimed to assess students' anxiety levels regarding English language learning and suggest pedagogical strategies for alleviating anxiety. The study, conducted with a sample of thirty students, found that learners exhibited a lack of confidence in sharing their opinions due to an inadequate classroom environment. The findings indicated that students faced significant anxiety concerning grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. This study suggested that fostering a more interactive and student-friendly environment could help reduce students' anxiety and enhance their English language learning experience.

Further, Dangi (2023) examined anxiety among novice English teachers at the basic level in Nepalese educational institutions. The study aimed to identify the academic, pedagogical, and psychological anxieties faced by novice teachers, along with the challenges they encountered and strategies to overcome these difficulties. The findings revealed that beginner-level English teachers struggled with classroom management due to insufficient content knowledge, limited further studies, inadequate teaching materials, heterogeneous classrooms, and a lack of administrative support. These factors contributed to heightened anxiety among teachers, which in turn affected their teaching effectiveness. The study emphasized the importance of teacher training programs that address these issues to enhance teaching quality and minimize professional anxiety.

Several international studies have also explored the impact of anxiety on language learning. Tanveer (2007) conducted research at the University of Glasgow, Scotland, investigating the primary causes of FLA among second-language learners. The study focused on the influence of anxiety on speaking skills and communication processes in second-language acquisition. The findings indicated that speaking anxiety was one of the most prevalent issues, significantly affecting students' ability to engage in classroom discussions and communicate effectively in English.

Similarly, Wang (2009) analyzed foreign language anxiety among university-level students in Taiwan as part of his doctoral dissertation at the University of Leeds. The results showed that Taiwanese university students experienced high levels of anxiety when learning English, particularly in spoken communication. The study suggested that language instructors should implement anxiety-reducing strategies such as cooperative learning, increased exposure to speaking opportunities, and student-centered teaching methods.

In another study, Rafik-Galea (2010) examined anxiety in academic reading performance among ESL students in Malaysia. The research identified that many students encountered significant levels of reading anxiety due to unfamiliar vocabulary, complex sentence structures, and difficulties in comprehension. The study recommended that educators adopt reading strategies that gradually expose students to complex texts and provide structured reading comprehension exercises to ease anxiety. Moreover, Lucas et al. (2011) conducted a study in the Philippines to analyze FLA among EFL learners. Their findings demonstrated that a considerable number of students experienced foreign language anxiety, particularly when engaging in speaking activities. The research highlighted the need for supportive classroom environments where students could practice English without fear of making mistakes or being judged.

Dewaele and Ip (2013) investigated the relationship between classroom anxiety and self-rated English proficiency among ESL learners in China. The study found that students with higher self-rated English proficiency reported lower levels of anxiety, whereas those with low self-rated proficiency experienced heightened anxiety levels. This study underscored the significance of self-confidence and the role of positive reinforcement in reducing FLA among learners. In a similar vein, Nazir et al. (2014) explored anxiety in speaking skills among Pakistani ESL learners at the intermediate level. The research found that students faced high levels of speaking anxiety due to limited exposure to English, fear of negative evaluation, and lack of fluency. The study suggested that English teachers should incorporate speaking activities that encourage gradual participation, thus helping students build confidence in spoken English.

Khan (2015) measured ESL students' anxiety in a Pakistani university and identified different types of FLA among learners. The research suggested that integrating communicative language teaching (CLT) methodologies could help reduce anxiety and improve language learning outcomes. Likewise, Asif (2017) examined the factors contributing to EFL anxiety among Saudi students. The study, conducted among EFL instructors, revealed that multiple factors, such as fear of making mistakes, lack of proficiency, and pressure from teachers, contributed to heightened anxiety levels. The findings emphasized the need for teachers to adopt student-friendly instructional methods to alleviate FLA. Haq et al. (2022) conducted a case study analyzing language stress and anxiety among first-year ESL students. Their research indicated that students frequently experienced stress due to unfamiliar language structures, lack of exposure, and performance pressure. The study suggested that incorporating mindfulness techniques and anxiety-reducing classroom activities could be beneficial in alleviating FLA.

Unlike previous studies that focused on specific language skills, the present study aims to explore FLA in relation to all four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Moreover, it seeks to identify strategies that EFL learners employ to overcome language anxiety. The study specifically examines how anxiety is experienced by students studying in Nepali-medium instruction schools at grades nine and ten, providing insights into the local educational context. By addressing these aspects, this study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of language anxiety and its implications for secondary-level EFL learners in Nepal.

The findings from this research will be instrumental for language instructors in developing effective teaching strategies to reduce anxiety and enhance students' overall language proficiency. Furthermore, it will serve as a foundational study for future research in the field of FLA among Nepalese EFL learners, particularly at the secondary level. Given the significant impact of anxiety on language learning, educators need to acknowledge and address these challenges to create a more supportive and conducive learning environment for ESL students. By implementing strategies that promote confidence-building and minimize anxiety, teachers can facilitate a more effective language learning experience for students.

Methodology

We utilized the descriptive research design to examine the factors contributing to linguistic anxiety among secondary-level students in EFL classrooms. The research was conducted in three community schools located in Tikapur Municipality, Kailali district, Sudurpaschim Province, Nepal. Two of these schools follow a Nepali medium of instruction, while the third employs both English and Nepali. However, for data collection purposes, only students from Nepali medium instruction classes were included in the study to specifically investigate their experiences of anxiety while acquiring English as a foreign language. Before data collection, the researchers introduced the study objectives to school administrators, teachers, and students, obtaining the necessary permissions to ensure ethical compliance. To maintain confidentiality, the names of the schools were not disclosed. Using a random sampling technique, 60 secondary-level students from grades 9 and 10 were selected, with each school contributing 20 students. Gender representation was carefully maintained, with an equal distribution of 30 male and 30 female students.

To provide demographic insights into the study's participants, students were required to report their municipality/rural municipality and ward number. The majority of respondents (93.33%) were from Tikapur Municipality, while a small proportion (6.6%) belonged to Janaki Rural Municipality. Despite all three schools being located in Ward No. 1 of Tikapur Municipality, students from six wards participated in the study, with the highest proportion (58.33%) coming from Ward No. 1. Additionally, the age distribution revealed that the largest group (58%) consists of students aged 15–16, followed by 27% aged 13–14, and 15% above the age of 16, with no respondents younger than 13. The research tools used for data collection were a structured questionnaire designed in Google Forms, divided into three sections. The first section gathered demographic data, the second contained six closed-ended questions addressing the first research question, and the third included an open-ended question aimed at answering the second research question.

To collect data, the researchers visited the schools and met with students in person. The students accessed the Google Form via a link provided on the researcher's personal computer and completed the form individually. For ethical reasons, the names of the schools and research participants were not disclosed. The researcher organized the data based on the themes relevant to the research questions.

Results

This section presents the results of the study thematically after analyzing the data. It includes teachers' anxiety in terms of receptive skills, productive skills, EFL classrooms, domain, causal factors of anxiety and anxiety management strategies.

Receptive Skills and Anxiety

To assess anxiety related to receptive skills, students responded to two closed-ended questions with four response options: "Yes, most often," "No, never," "Sometimes," and "Maybe." This structured format measured anxiety experiences in language acquisition and receptive skills.

Analysis reveals (See Appendix 1) that 17% of students frequently experience listening-related anxiety. This represents a notable minority with persistent difficulties in this receptive skill domain. Conversely, 18% reported no anxiety concerning listening skills, suggesting approximately one-fifth of participants possess confidence in this area. The majority (57%) reported occasional anxiety, indicating that while listening anxiety is not a constant challenge, it remains relatively prevalent among students. These findings contrast with Tahsildar and Yussof's (2014) study, which reported high listening anxiety levels in 58% of Malaysian students, suggesting potential cultural or contextual differences in anxiety manifestation. Eight percent of participants expressed uncertainty regarding their listening anxiety, potentially indicating fluctuating or context-dependent experiences that students found difficult to categorize.

Regarding reading skills (See Appendix 2), 13% of participants reported frequent anxiety, demonstrating that a smaller yet significant minority experiences consistent reading-related anxiety in language learning contexts. This finding aligns with Brantmeier's (2005) research, suggesting that second language reading generally elicits lower anxiety levels compared to other language skills. Additionally, 17% of students reported no reading anxiety, indicating substantial confidence in this receptive skill. The majority of participants (60%) reported occasional anxiety, suggesting that intermittent reading anxiety represents a common experience among language learners. Ten percent expressed uncertainty about their reading anxiety levels, potentially indicating variable experiences depending on specific reading contexts or materials.

Productive Skills and Anxiety

To evaluate anxiety associated with productive skills, an identical methodological approach was employed using the same four response options to systematically assess students' experiences with speaking and writing anxiety.

Data analysis (See Appendix 3) reveals that 55% of students frequently experience anxiety when speaking English in classroom settings. This finding demonstrates consistency with Woodrow's (2006) research, which identified communication with teachers and performing in front of peers as primary contributors to speaking anxiety. Only 10% of participants reported never experiencing speaking anxiety, representing a small minority of students who maintain consistent confidence in their oral production skills. Thirty percent indicated occasional anxiety, suggesting that a substantial proportion of students face intermittent challenges with speaking tasks. Five percent expressed uncertainty regarding their speaking anxiety, potentially reflecting difficulty in self-assessment or highly variable experiences. The predominance of frequent anxiety suggests speaking represents a significant challenge in English language classrooms, with implications for instructional approaches and classroom environment management.

Regarding writing skills (See Appendix 4), 18% of students reported frequent anxiety when engaging with written production tasks. This represents a notably smaller proportion compared to

speaking anxiety, suggesting that writing may present fewer psychological barriers for many students. Fifteen percent indicated never experiencing writing anxiety, reflecting a minority who maintain consistent confidence in their written production abilities. The plurality of respondents (44%) reported occasional writing anxiety, suggesting that intermittent challenges rather than persistent difficulties characterize most students' experiences with writing tasks. Notably, 23% selected "Maybe," indicating uncertainty or situational variability in their writing anxiety experiences.

These findings suggest differential anxiety patterns across receptive and productive language skills, with speaking emerging as the most anxiety-inducing domain. The prevalence of occasional anxiety across all skills indicates that language anxiety represents a common though not necessarily persistent challenge for most learners. The varying proportions of students reporting frequent anxiety across different skills suggest the potential value of skill-specific anxiety management strategies in language instruction.

EFL Classroom and Anxiety

Anxiety in the EFL classroom can stem from various factors that affect students' confidence, participation, and overall learning experience. Understanding the specific domains in which students experience anxiety is crucial for developing effective pedagogical strategies to mitigate its impact. This section examines the key areas where students report feeling anxious in English classrooms, providing insights into how different classroom activities contribute to language anxiety.

Domains of Anxiety

To investigate the specific domains in which students experience anxiety in English classrooms, participants were asked to identify all areas in which they experience anxiety, selecting from tests/exams, group activities, presentations, and communication. Analysis of the data (See Appendix 5) indicates that 72% of respondents (n=43) reported experiencing anxiety in test/exam situations, representing the highest prevalence among the four domains. This finding aligns with Horwitz et al.'s (1986) framework, which posits that anxiety can manifest in various forms, including communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety.

Presentation-related anxiety was reported by 37% of participants (n=23), constituting the second most common anxiety trigger. This finding corresponds with Young's (1991) observation that second language learners frequently experience fear of self-exposure, manifesting as apprehension about revealing themselves or being spotlighted before peers. Communication activities generated anxiety for 28% of respondents (n=17), indicating a moderate level of concern in this domain. Group activities emerged as the least anxiety-provoking context, with only 13% of participants (n=6) reporting anxiety in collaborative settings.

Causal Factors of Anxiety

Analysis of data regarding anxiety etiology reveals varying degrees of influence from factors including proficiency levels, teaching styles, learner personality, and motivation. Participants were asked to identify all applicable causes of their anxiety from provided options, with responses aggregated to determine prevalence.

The data (See Appendix 6) indicates that the relative level of proficiency/nervousness emerged as the predominant cause of anxiety, with 77% of respondents (n=46) identifying it as a contributing factor. This suggests that a substantial proportion of students experience anxiety due to their perceived or actual proficiency levels and associated nervousness. Lack of motivation and support was identified as the second most common cause, reported by 32% of participants (n=19), highlighting the significance of motivational and support structures in anxiety reduction. Twenty-five percent of

respondents (n=15) indicated that learner personality and attitude toward learning also contribute to anxiety, suggesting that personal traits and dispositions significantly influence anxiety levels. The least reported cause was teaching style and learning atmosphere, identified by only 10% of participants (n=6), suggesting that while pedagogical approaches and classroom environment are relevant, they may be less critical in anxiety causation compared to other factors.

Anxiety Mitigation Strategies

Response analysis (See Appendix 7) regarding anxiety mitigation strategies demonstrates that students employ a multifaceted approach to overcoming language anxiety. Participants utilize a combination of traditional resources, interactive activities, and modern technology to build confidence and proficiency across all language skills.

For listening skills, students engage with English songs on YouTube and curriculum-prescribed audio materials, facilitating exposure to diverse accents. Speaking proficiency is enhanced through conversations with peers and instructors, participation in group discussions, and engagement with English-language media on YouTube, providing both practice opportunities and contextual understanding. Reading skills are developed through library resources, pronunciation correction with instructors and digital dictionaries, ensuring both accuracy and comprehension. For writing skills, students engage in independent practice, solicit feedback from instructors, and utilize digital resources for spelling and grammar correction, fostering confidence and competence in written expressions.

Discussion

Findings indicate that speaking induces the highest levels of anxiety among students in English classrooms, followed by writing, listening, and reading. Speaking anxiety is particularly prevalent, with 55% of respondents reporting frequent anxiety while speaking in class. This aligns with Horwitz et al. (1986), who asserted that speaking is often the most anxiety-inducing skill due to fear of making errors, negative peer evaluations, and performance pressure. Given the prominence of speaking anxiety, targeted interventions, such as increasing practice opportunities, fostering a positive classroom atmosphere, and offering constructive feedback, are essential for enhancing students' speaking confidence and competence (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

Listening anxiety, while not as intense as speaking anxiety, remains a significant concern. The data reveal that 57% of students occasionally feel anxious about listening tasks, whereas 17% frequently experience anxiety in this domain. These findings suggest that comprehension difficulties, particularly in response to fast or unfamiliar accents, contribute to listening-related anxiety. Conversely, 18% of students report no anxiety when listening, suggesting that receptive skills pose fewer challenges for some learners. Implementing strategies such as gradual exposure to diverse English accents, teaching active listening techniques, and fostering supportive listening environments could help reduce anxiety levels (Kim, 2000).

Among the four skills, reading provokes the least anxiety, with only 13% of students frequently experiencing anxiety, whereas 60% report occasional anxiety. The lower anxiety levels in reading may be attributed to its self-paced nature, which allows students to process information at their own speed. Additionally, reading lacks the immediate pressure associated with performance, unlike speaking tasks. Despite this, any level of anxiety in reading warrants interventions to enhance comprehension and confidence through engaging and diverse reading materials (Saito et.al., 1999).

In contrast, writing anxiety is more pronounced than reading anxiety. Approximately 23% of respondents frequently experience anxiety while writing in English, which is higher than the anxiety

levels reported for reading. The largest group, 44%, occasionally feels anxious about writing. The relatively high percentage of students who experience some degree of writing anxiety suggests a need for instructional approaches that build confidence, such as process-oriented writing instruction, individualized feedback, and strategies for reducing the fear of making grammatical mistakes (Cheng et.al., 1999).

Further analysis of anxiety triggers reveals significant variation across different contexts. The data suggest that test- and exam-related anxiety is the most pervasive, underscoring the stress associated with evaluative situations. This finding supports previous research indicating that performance assessments are a major source of anxiety that can impact both academic outcomes and psychological well-being (Horwitz et al., 1986). By contrast, anxiety levels related to group activities are relatively low, possibly due to the collaborative nature of such tasks, which provide students with peer support and shared responsibilities.

Presentation-related anxiety emerges as another substantial concern. This is consistent with the well-documented fear of public speaking and performance anxiety in front of an audience. Likewise, communication-related anxiety is notable, albeit to a lesser extent than test and presentation anxiety. This could be attributed to apprehensions about social evaluation or potential misunderstandings during interpersonal interactions. The findings highlight the multifaceted nature of language learning anxiety, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to mitigate test and public-speaking-related stressors and improve overall student well-being.

An analysis of the primary causes of anxiety among students reveals that proficiency levels and nervousness are the most frequently cited factors. Many students perceive their own linguistic competence as inadequate, leading to heightened anxiety in language tasks. This supports findings from MacIntyre and Gardner (1991), who identified self-perceived competence as a key determinant of language anxiety. Consequently, fostering self-confidence and addressing proficiency gaps through structured skill development and supportive learning environments is crucial.

In contrast, teaching styles and classroom atmosphere are cited by relatively few students as major sources of anxiety. While these factors undoubtedly contribute to the learning experience, they appear to be secondary to individual proficiency levels in influencing anxiety. Furthermore, personal characteristics, such as attitudes toward learning and intrinsic personality traits, are recognized as significant determinants of anxiety. This finding suggests the need for personalized instructional approaches that accommodate students' psychological profiles and learning preferences. Additionally, a lack of motivation and external support is reported as another contributing factor. Enhancing student motivation and implementing robust support systems, such as mentoring programs and encouragement from teachers, could be instrumental in alleviating language learning anxiety.

Responses to the open-ended question (Appendix 7) illustrate that students employ a diverse range of strategies to manage anxiety in language learning. For listening skills, many students rely on digital resources, such as English songs on YouTube and audio materials prescribed by the Curriculum Development Center (CDC), to familiarize themselves with different accents and pronunciations. In speaking, students engage in peer conversations, classroom discussions, and exposure to English media, including movies and conversational videos, which provide practical and contextual learning experiences.

Reading strategies primarily involve self-directed learning through library books, with pronunciation guidance provided by teachers and online dictionaries. These approaches help students develop both accuracy and comprehension. Writing proficiency is enhanced through independent

practice, teacher feedback, and digital resources, such as Google search tools for grammar and spelling checks.

The findings underscore the effectiveness of integrating traditional learning methods with interactive and technological tools in mitigating language learning anxiety. By combining structured classroom instruction with self-directed digital learning, students not only improve their linguistic proficiency but also build confidence in using English in diverse communicative settings. The study highlights the necessity of developing targeted pedagogical interventions that address specific anxiety triggers, foster self-confidence, and create a supportive learning environment for EFL students.

Conclusion and Implications

Anxiety is a complex and multi-dimensional issue that cannot be easily quantified. This research attempts to explore the anxiety experienced by secondary-level EFL learners in EFL classrooms. EFL students often approach English as an academic subject, yet they tend to lag in practical EFL learning. The findings of this study are crucial for enhancing EFL education. For Nepali secondary-level learners, EFL programs must be designed with this understanding to achieve effective EFL learning outcomes in Nepal.

The research highlights the varying degrees of anxiety experienced by Nepalese EFL students in secondary-level classrooms across different language skills. By understanding these nuances, educators can better design and implement interventions that address the specific needs of students, ultimately fostering a more supportive and effective language learning environment. Furthermore, this analysis highlights the need for comprehensive strategies in English language classrooms to address various forms of anxiety, with a tailored approach to different levels and types of anxiety experienced by students. Understanding and addressing these anxieties can help create a more supportive learning environment and improve student outcomes in English. It is essential to recognize that creating an anxiety-free environment for EFL learners not only improves their academic results but also helps them use English as a communication tool in a global context. Overall, the data underscores the importance of recognizing and addressing anxiety in language learning, tailoring interventions to the specific needs and experiences of students to foster a more supportive and effective learning environment.

This is a small-scale quantitative study conducted in a municipality of Kailali district with just sixty students as participants. Therefore, a large-scale quantitative or mixed-method study can be conducted surveying a large number of students about the anxiety they experience in English language classrooms. The data is collected from secondary-level students studying in grades nine and ten. Integrating students of grades eleven and twelve can be a further area of research that can be carried out in the context of Nepal.

References

Anxiety UK. (2018). *Anxiety conditions: Symptoms of anxiety*. https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/get-help/anxietyinformation

Asif, F. (2017). The anxiety factors among Saudi EFL learners: A study from English language teachers' perspective. *English Language Teaching*, *10*(6), 160-173. http://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v10n6p160

Brantmeier, C. (2005). Anxiety about L2 reading or L2 reading tasks? A study with advanced language learners. *The Reading Matrix, 5(2),* 67-76. https://readingmatrix.com/articles/brantmeier/article4.pdf

Dangi, Y. (2023). *Basic level novice English teachers' Anxiety for their professional development in Nepalese context* (Master's thesis, Department of English Education, Tribhuvan University). https://elibrary.tucl.edu.np/items/086ff03f-37a2-4f05-9c48-c619f01a3674

Dewaele, J-M., Petrides, V., & Furnham, A. (2008). Effects of trait emotional intelligence and semibiographical variables on communicative anxiety and foreign language anxiety among adult multilinguals: A review and empirical investigation. *Language Learning, 58 (4)*, 911–960. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9922.2008.00482.x
        Ellis, R. (1994). *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford University Press.

Haq, I.-U., Farhat, P. A., & Iqbal, S. W. (2022). Language stress and anxiety among the ESL students: A case study of first-year students in Pakistani context. *Annals of Human and Social Sciences, 3*(2), 647-655. http://dx.doi.org/10.35484/ahss.2022(3-II)61

Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal, 70*(2), 125-132. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.15404781.1986.tb05256.x

KC, L. (2010). *Anxiety among EFL learners* (Master's thesis, Department of English Education, Tribhuvan University). https://elibrary.tucl.edu.np/bitstreams/f4583b2e-570c-4886-b428-698899a8b5ca/download

Khan, S. M. (2015). Influence of speech anxiety on oral communication skills among ESL/EFL learners. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies, 6*(6), 49-53http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.alls.v.6n.6p.49

Krashen, S.D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Perganlon Press.

Lamichhane, S. (2019). *English Language Anxiety in Class Eight Students* (Master's thesis, Department of English Education, Tribhuvan University). https://elibrary.tucl.edu.np/bitstream/123456789/16693/1/Cover.pdf

Lightbown, P. M., & Spada, N. (2013). *How languages are learned (*4th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Lucas, R. I., Miraflores, E., & Go, D. (2011). English language learning anxiety among foreign language learners in the Philippines. *Philippine ESL Journal, 7*, 94-119. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/256495249_English_Language_Learning_Anxiety_among_Foreign_Language_Learners_in_the_Philippines

MacIntyre, P.D., Gardner, R.C. (1994). The subtle effects of language anxiety on cognitive processing in the second language. *Language Journal, 44*(2), 283-305. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1994.tb01103.x

Marcos-Llinás, M., & Garau, M. J. (2009). Effects of language anxiety on three proficiency-level courses of Spanish as a foreign language. *Foreign Language Annals, 42*(4), 676-693. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.2009.01010.x

Nazir, M., Bashir, S., & Raja, Z. B. (2014). A study of second language speaking anxiety among ESL intermediate Pakistani learners. *International Journal of English and Education, 3*(3), 216-229. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/277566995_A_Study_of_Second_Language_Speaking-Anxiety_among_ESL_Intermediate_Pakistani_Learners

Rafik-Galea, S. (2010). Anxiety and academic reading performance among Malay ESL learners. *Journal of Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics, 14*(2), 41-58. https://www.academia.edu/75149064/Anxiety_and_Academic_Reading_Performance_among

Rao, I., Jeevan, S., & Ahmad, A. (2023). Impact of metacognitive strategies on creative writing of ESL students at college level in district of Lahore. *Global Language Review, VIII(I), 315-324*. http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/glr.2023(VIII-I).29
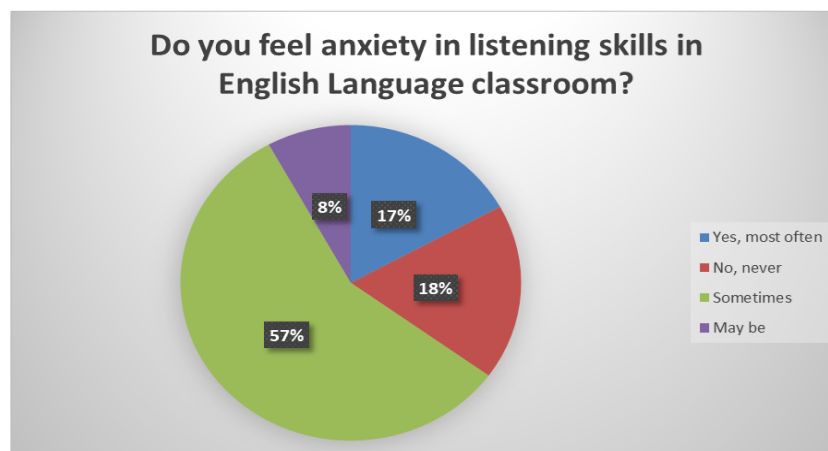
Scovel, T. (1991). The effect of affect on foreign language learning: A review of the anxiety research. In E. K. Horwitz, & D. L. Young, (Eds.). *Language anxiety: From theory and research to classroom implications.* Prentice Hall, pp. 15-24. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1978.tb00309.x

Shao, K., Yu, W., & Ji, Z. (2013). An exploration of Chinese EFL students' emotional intelligence and foreign language anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal, 97(*4), 917-   929. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2013.12042.x

Tahsildar, M. N., & Yusoff, Z. S. (2014). Investigating L2 students' listening anxiety: A survey at a Malaysian university. *International Journal of Language Education and Applied Linguistics (1), 43-52).http://dx.doi.org/10.15282/ijleal.v1.418*

Tanveer, M. (2007). *Investigation of the factors that cause language anxiety for ESL/EFL learners in learning speaking skills and the influence it casts on communication in the target language*. University of Glasgow, Scotland.

The British Psychological Society, (2019). *An A to Z of psychology: Anxiety*. https://www.bps.org.uk/public/a-z-ofpsychology

Vogely, A. J. (1998). *Listening comprehension anxiety: Students' reported sources and solutions*. *Foreign Language Annals*, 31(1), 67-80. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.1998.tb01333.x

Wang, Y.-C. (2009). *Anxiety in English language learning: A case study of Taiwanese university students on a study abroad programme*. University of Leeds.

Woodrow, L. (2006). Anxiety and speaking English as a second language. *RELC, 37*(3), 308- 328. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0033688206071315

Young, D. J. (1991). Creating a low-anxiety classroom environment: What does language anxiety research suggest? *The Modern Language Journal, 75*(4), 426-439. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1991.tb05378.x
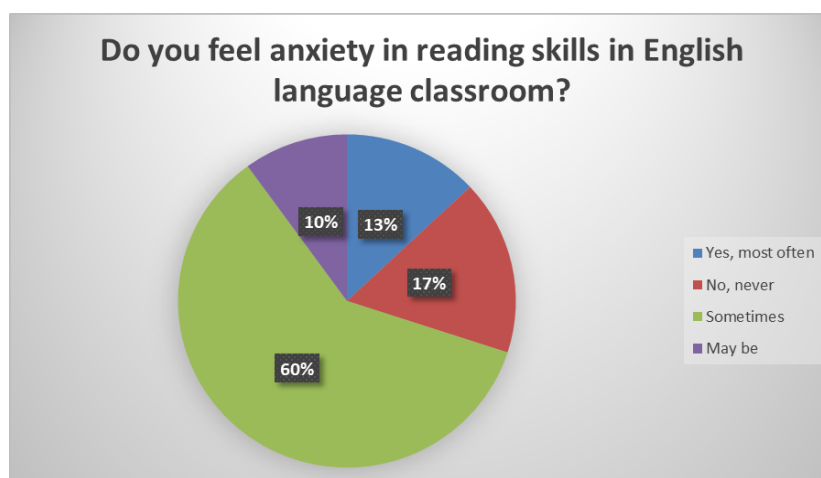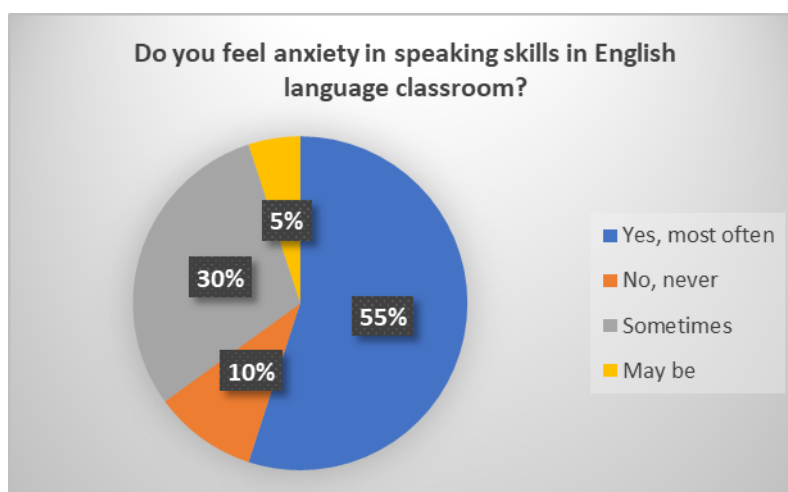
Author's Bio

Mrs Samjhana Aryal is a PhD Scholar at the Faculty of Education, Far Western University, Nepal. She has presented papers at various conferences and published articles in indexed journals.
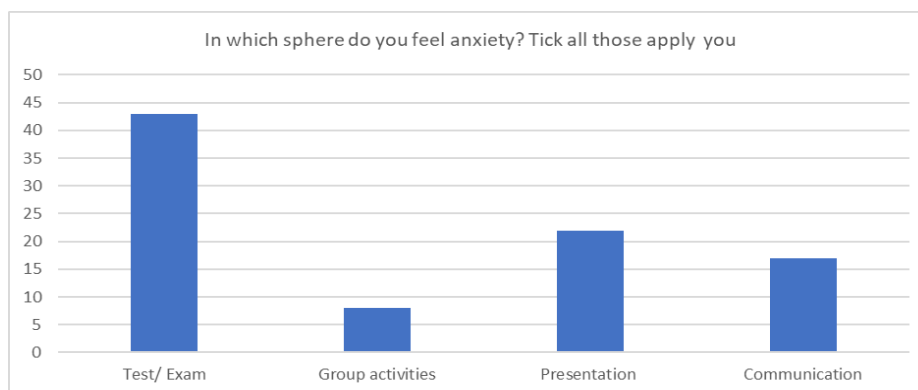
Dr. Jnanu Raj Paudel is an Assistant Professor at Tikapur Multiple Campus, Far Western University, Nepal. He has presented several papers at national and international conferences and published a dozen of research articles in various journals. His area of interest is language policy and planning in education.
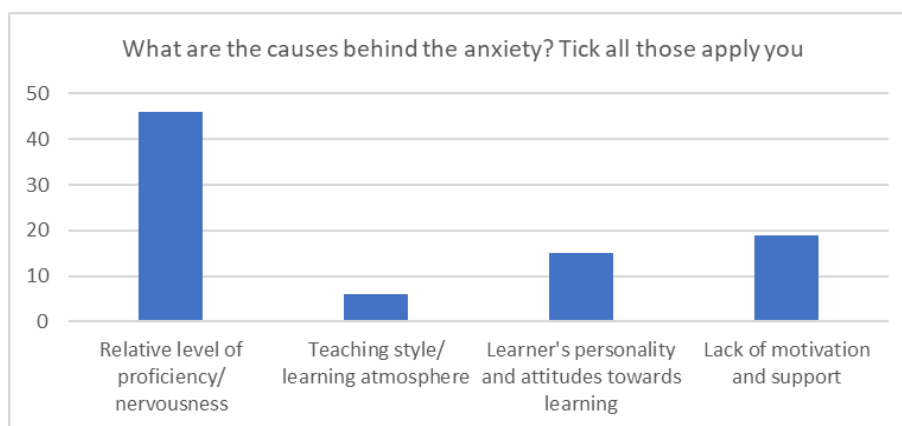
Appendix 1

Appendix 2

Appendix 3

Appendix 4

Appendix 5

In which sphere do you feel anxiety? Tick all those apply you

Appendix 6

What are the causes behind the anxiety? Tick all those apply you

Appendix 7

Linguistic Skills	Extracts from Responses
Listening skills	Listening to English songs on YouTube Listening to the prescribed audio by the CDC
Speaking skills	Speaking with friends and teachers Taking part in group discussions and sharing Watching movies, short films, and having easy conversations in English on YouTube
Reading skills	Reading books, stories from the library Correcting pronunciation with the help of a teacher and an online dictionary
Writing skills	Self-writing practice at home and consult the teacher Writing assignments and homework By correcting spelling and grammar in Google search