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English Language Anxiety Among Pakistani University Students: Causes and Coping Strategies

Dr. Muhammad Akram Mankash¹

Dr. Khadim Hussain Dahri²

Muhammad Naveed³

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Dr. Muhammad Akram Mankash	Principal, Hazrat Shahjahangir Academy (Faculty of English Language & Literature), Karachi. a.mankash59@hotmail.com
Dr. Khadim Hussain Dahri	Assistant Professor, HoD, Department of Education, Benazir Bhutto Shaheed University Lyari Karachi. khadimhussain@bbsul.edu.pk
Muhammad Naveed	M.Phil. Scholar, Department of Arabic, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad. abdulahadna3@gmail.com

Abstract

Present research addresses English Language Anxiety (ELA) experienced by university students in Karachi-Pakistan and its causes, effects, and ways of coping with it. Using quantitative descriptive survey design, data was collected from 300 undergraduate students in five public and private universities. The results suggest that fear of negative evaluation is the foremost contributor, followed by low self-esteem and lack of sufficient proficiency in the language. Higher ELA was reported by females and students in Social Sciences disciplines as compared to males and other students in technical fields. Peer help, language self-practice, and self-encouragement are the most commonly used strategies. Regression analysis shows that fear of negative evaluation, low self-confidence, and insufficient self-efficacy account collectively for 68% of the variance in ELA levels. These findings support the importance of ELA institutional factors like language labs and workshops for ameliorating ELA to improve learners' experience with language learning. Like most studies, this one posed several questions which remain unanswered. The questions raise fears of the adverse impacts of ignoring such trends, inadequate technological solutions, and a lack of interdisciplinary and intercultural studies. These ELA timidity issues must be taken up for examination in future studies.

Keywords: English Language Anxiety (ELA), Fear of Negative Evaluation, Coping Strategies, Language Proficiency

INTRODUCTION

Due to globalization, English has become a crucial element in communication, education, and professional development (Atif, Ullah & Rehman, 2024). According to the Khan and Mohammed (2024), it plays an undeniable role in global communication, but more importantly, it serves as a gateway to higher education, career opportunities, and participation in international affairs. Bibi, Irshad and Begum (2024), also stated that English in Pakistan is not just treated as a foreign language; it has become an integral part of the country's educational and professional systems. It is taught in schools and utilized as the language of instruction in many universities, particularly at the graduate and professional levels (Kainaat, Wajid, Ullah, & Raza, 2024). The truth, however, is that a large number of students in Pakistan have a fear of speaking English,

especially in academic context (Hashmi, et al., 2021; Tuba & Rana, 2015). This fear has been termed English Language Anxiety (ELA), and it has negative effects on the students' academic engagement, productivity, and overall language learning experience (Akhtar, et al., 2020; Rana, & Tuba, 2017).

According to the Anwar et al., (2019) this is not an isolated occurrence unique to Pakistan, but has also been noted across the globe, especially in non-English speaking countries. Hameed and Akhtar (2023), research has shown that fear of communicating, listening, or writing in English can take the form of ELA. This usually stems from sociological, psychological, and educational causes like ESLA, which stands for evaluation apprehension anxiety, self-doubt, and perceived language incompetence (Ansari, Akhtar & Hafeez, 2024; Hussain, et al., 2022). Leads to a highly self-destructive cycle where the individual is anxious about using the language, which in return leads to a deterioration in their ability to function, which only worsens the anxiety (Imran, et al., 2023; Hafeez, Iqbal, & Imran, 2021). According to the Khan, Hussain and Ahmad (2023) stated that studying in English-speaking nations specifically have to deal with English as a status symbol, which is prevalent in most of the societies these individuals are coming from. The need to do well in English does not help the anxiety, especially for individuals from non-English speaking families (Khan, Hussain & Ahmad, 2023; Ahmed, Ahmed & Buriro, 2023).

Researcher could not find much academic research on university students in Pakistan, and while there exists some work for the English Language Arts (ELA) field, it is not extensive (Imran, Zaidi, & Rehan, 2024; Imran, Sultana, & Ahmed, 2023). Imran, Sultana and Ahmed (2023) stated in their study ELA as a field in other Anglo-centric countries must form a framework which considers Pakistan's exceptional social, cultural, and education systems. According to the Anwar et al., (2019) instance, the inherited appreciation of English in Pakistan raises the phenomena of educational elitism, which as a medium of instruction in education tends to condition the degree and scope of ELA in Pakistan. Hameed and Akhtar (2023) added, Pakistani society which is primarily Urdu and regional language speaking faces another challenge. As students learn multiple languages, they experience, in addition to other language-related issues, something known as 'language anxiety' when tackling the English language in academic settings (Hashmi, et al., 2021; Tuba & Rana, 2015).

Objective of the study is to find the sources of ELA amongst Pakistani graduate students and to find ways to improve these effects also (Sarfranz, Raja, & Malik, 2022; Khan, Farooq & Kamal, 2023; Raja, Raju, & Raja, 2021; Sarfranz, Raju, & Aksar, 2018). The study pursues to assist academia and the profession in Pakistan for the benefit of the faculty, teachers, the student, and the policymakers also (Khan, Farooq & Kamal, 2023; Raja, Raju, & Raja, 2021). When properly dealing with the identified causes of ELA in these conditions, there is a possibility of developing strategies that control the distress sources and provide a supportive educational environment (Zafar, et al., 2023; Khan, Farooq, & Kamal, 2023; Khan, Ann, & Khatoon, 2022).

This study is of great significance. One's command over English, both as a native and foreign speaker, has a bearing on success in higher education and the global job market (Raja, Raju, &

Raja, 2021; Sarfraz, Raju, & Aksar, 2018). In a country like Pakistan with abysmally high unemployment levels and stiff competition, speakers of English have an added edge over their counterparts (Hashmi, et al., 2021; Tuba & Rana, 2015). If ELA goes unchecked and continues restricting students from learning and using English properly, it will severely dampen their academic and career prospects (Atif, Ullah & Rehman, 2024). This study attempts to serve the greater good of improving English language education in Pakistan by outlining the hypothesis of reasons underlying ELA and how to mitigate it for the betterment of students (Zafar, et al., 2023; Khan, Ann, & Khatoon, 2022).

This research is also useful for learners as the learners of today have to deal with English as a lingua franca due to globalization. Increased communication by the Pakistani workforce will enhance the productivity and competitiveness of many in the economy (Atif, Ullah & Rehman, 2024). This is to aid and develop a more English proficient and confident Pakistani generation to address the challenges of ELA where large numbers of students suffer from anxiety (Zafar, et al., 2023).

On the policy front, this study has the potential to resolve issues concerning pedagogical reasoning and resource allocation in a thorough manner (Khan, Ann, & Khatoon, 2022). In Pakistan, various strategies can be employed to enhance the English learning and interacting experience, such as improving the motivation to communicate in English (Nawaz, et al., 2024; Azhar, 2024). At the organizational level, universities can implement more ELA approaches that lessen anxiety or discomfort for students, such as improving access to language labs and changing classroom settings to be more inviting (Oad, Zaidi, & Phulpoto, 2023; Imran, Zaidi, & Khanzada, 2023).

It is important to note that this research spans much more than the individual level. Institutions need to be considered, and so systems like universities can help with ELA programme design (Oad, Zaidi, & Phulpoto, 2023). To emphasize the point, the most effective ELA should provide the least restrictive language education policy and the most generous resource allocation for teacher training (Afzal, Khan, & Sikandar, 2023; Malik, Sarfraz, & Seemal, 2021; Khan, Ann, & Khatoon, 2022).

To sum up, English Language anxiety is one of the significant factors that influences students studying in universities of Pakistan (Imran, Zaidi, & Khanzada, 2023; Raju, & Aksar, 2018). Even when this phenomenon exists in many societies and contexts, the distinctly Pakistani socio-cultural and educational setting requires further exploration (Khan, Mohammed & Mustafa, 2024). This research attempts to explore the factors which create ELA as well as suggest adequate coping strategies so that English language teaching in Pakistan is more effective and helpful to students suffering from anxiety (Nawaz, et al., 2024; Azhar, 2024; Akhtar, & Khan, 2021). The conclusions of the research bear enormous consequences on educational practices and policies as well as institutional support systems, improving conditions for students regardless of the level in which they are learning (Akhtar, & Khan, 2021; Raju, & Aksar, 2018).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the present study are as follows:

1. To dig deeper into causes of English language anxiety among university students in Pakistan.
2. To analyze the correlation between ELA and students' participation and performance in their studies.
3. To identify the strategies that the students use in attempt to manage their ELA.
4. To provide recommendations to educators and decision makers regarding approaches to deal with ELA in Pakistan's higher education institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the Akhtar and Khan (2021) English Language Anxiety (ELA) is a type of anxiety that occurs in situations where an individual is expected to communicate in English, especially in educational, professional, or social environments. It is quite complex as it captures a wide spectrum of emotional, cognitive, and behavioural responses which may involve fear, self-doubt, and avoidance (Nawaz, et al., 2024; Azhar, 2024; Akhtar, & Khan, 2021). The underlying basis of ELA is found in foreign language anxiety (FLA), which was systematically identified for the first time by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986). They described FLA as "a constellation of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours that are connected with learning a new language in an academic setting." This definition portrays the strangest fears and apprehension associated with trying to learn a second or third language, ranging from the reluctance to attempt any speech out of embarrassment, the heavy expectations placed on them, and even the mental strain involved in learning a new system of language (Azhar, 2024; Akhtar, & Khan, 2021). ELA, as a construct of FLA, relates to the non-native English speakers' anxiety associated with using English which is a high language in the international context and is linked with education and employment opportunities (Azhar, 2024).

According to the Khan, Ann and Khatoon (2022) the origins of English language anxiety (ELA) are quite extensive and complex ranging from psychological, social, and even educational components. The most common one out of the many is the fear of negative evaluation. This fear stems from the language gaps students feel they have against their peers, teachers or even within themselves (Nawaz, et al., 2024; Azhar, 2024; Khan, Ann, & Khatoon, 2022). Students who are being taught through English may have it worst because they are hyper aware of their perceived limitations. This fear can take multiple forms like not being able to actively participate in classroom conversations, speak in front of a class or talk much, constantly critiquing themselves and their language skills (Azhar, 2024; Khan, Ann, & Khatoon, 2022). This fear of negative evaluation can be attributed to another well-known cause of ELA, low self-esteem and confidence. Students with low self-esteem regarding their English capabilities will most likely feel anxious because they do not have the desire to be engaged in any language-related tasks (Nawaz, et al., 2024; Azhar, 2024; Khan, Ann, & Khatoon, 2022). They don't possess confidence because this only makes them recall past experiences like harsh feedback or unmet language learning expectations (Malik, Sarfraz, & Seemal, 2021; Sarfraz, Raju, & Aksar, 2018).

Being unable to speak the English language fluently is another major problem with ELA (Sarfraz, Raja, & Malik, 2022; Khan, Farooq & Kamal, 2023). Those with insufficient vocabulary,

grammatical, or pronunciation skills in English tend to have a lack of self-confidence when it comes to speaking the language (Khan, Farooq & Kamal, 2023). When communication becomes frustrating and embarrassing, a person tends to avoid situations where they are required to speak, for example, in group communications, presentations, or essay writing (Sarfraz, Raja, & Malik, 2022; Khan, Farooq & Kamal, 2023). According to the Irshad, Malik and Sarfraz (2023), there is also a psychological feeling of inadequacy or lowered self-esteem that comes from the gap between the student's language competencies and the expectations of the level they are required to achieve academically or professionally (Shehzad, Khan, & Noor, 2023). Moreover, cultural issues can contribute to students' experiences of ELA scope. In some cultures, making errors in speech is so much frowned upon that it can attract various forms of social punitive actions by peers. Such sociocultural stigma can increase the pressure to speak English proficiently, thus making them more anxious (Afzal, Khan, & Sikandar, 2023; Shehzad, Khan, & Noor, 2023). Like in Pakistan, English is the language of class and social mobility and it is feared that mistakes can draw unwanted attention, because students regard their abilities in the language as a measure of their intelligence, status, and social acceptance (Saba, Fatima, Farooq, & Zafar, 2021; Saba, Tabish, & Khan, 2017).

The direct effects of ELA revolve around decreased engagement in classroom activities, which is among the most significant (Afzal, Khan, & Sikandar, 2023; Shehzad, Khan, & Noor, 2023). These anxious students, more often than not, will attempt to go further in avoiding any sort of interaction in the class: this includes speaking, sharing information, debating, and even attempting to answer posed questions if they actually know the answer (Saba, Tabish, & Khan, 2017). Malik, Sarfraz and Seemal (2021), stated that not only does this behaviour decrease their chances of practicing the language, but it escalates their anxiety, building a cycle that is quite hard to dismantle. Let's face it, in the long term, participation decreases and so does students' academic performance all because they fail to utilize feedback and learning from instructors and other peers, which is essential in their academic progression (Saba, Fatima, Farooq, & Zafar, 2021). Another crucial and salient impact of ELA centers around lowered academic performance (Irshad, Malik, & Sarfraz, 2023). Anxiety, which is one of the major causes of ELA, decreases students' ability to think which is critical for focus, recalling information, and reasoning during examinations or even assignments (Malik, Sarfraz, & Seemal, 2021). It also leads to interference in cognitive functioning, hence causing poor performance and amplifying other associated difficulties, forming a negative feedback loop. In worst-case scenarios, ELA can lead to disengagement in academics and even dropping out of school. Students are likely to feel that they are overwhelmed with academic expectations and not proficient enough at the language, leading to a feeling of inadequacy (Irshad, Malik, & Sarfraz, 2023; Afzal, Khan, & Sikandar, 2023). Along with its structural aspects, the English Language Arts (ELA) can detrimentally impact a student's emotional health (Imran & Akhtar, 2023). The stress of performing English alone, together with the dread of erring, can create feelings of being frustrated, embarrassed, and lacking in self-worth (Imran & Akhtar, 2023). A student could observe their battle with English as a solely personal challenge, which, in turn, worsens their self-image and sense of worth. Such

negative emotional conditions can transfer to other areas of life affecting their relationships, mental health, and quality of life. For a few learners, ELA could even further the development of deeper psychological issues like depression or generalized anxiety disorder (Phulpoto, Oad, & Imran, 2024; Imran & Akhtar, 2023). The emotional consequences of ELA highlight that the problem needs to be resolved as an educational issue and as a matter of the wellbeing of the students (Phulpoto, Oad, & Imran, 2024; Imran & Akhtar, 2023).

Even with the hurdles that ELA brings, students find ways to combat their anxiety and work on language skills. One of the most widely reported strategies is peer assistance. When learners help each other with language practice, it fosters encouragement which lessens the sense of loneliness that often comes with ELA (Phulpoto, Oad, & Imran, 2024). Peer support can be in the form of study circles; language help pairs or even casual English conversations. Through practicing together, students can boost their self-esteem in a safe setting where their judgement fears are put to rest. Another helpful way to cope is through routine language practice. A systematic approach to speaking, listening, reading, and writing enables students to use English more freely and in diverse scenarios. Both inside and outside the class, learners can engage in these through journaling, watching English films, and joining English language clubs. Gradually, through routine effort, learners may notice minor changes in their English skills and become even less anxious.

Another strategy that is effective in overcoming ELA barriers is positive self-talk. Students can change negative thoughts and self-defeating talk into affirmations with positive self-talk and build a more constructive self-image. Students do not need to focus only on their mistakes or self-defeating beliefs but remember their progress and the strengths they possess (Sarfraz, Raja, & Malik, 2022; Sarfraz, Raju, & Aksar, 2018). This new twist enables students to lessen the fear of failure and be more willing to take chances in learning the language. Another coping strategy is seeking help from instructors, tutors, or even the internet. Instructors offer guidance and constructive feedback as well as encouragement. This assists students to manage their language learning experience better. Sometimes, students can use language labs or the internet for self-study through language learning resources. With these, students can fill gaps in classroom learning and master problem areas.

Alongside individual coping strategies, institutional support is important for investigators concerning the ELA. Some supportive measures can be employed by universities to help students learn better (Sarfraz, Raja, & Malik, 2022; Sarfraz, Raju, & Aksar, 2018). For instance, pupils may be taught techniques like mindfulness and relaxation exercises that will help in reducing their anxiety. Greater access to resources like language labs, differentiation from the students, teaching tutoring, or even workshops on effective learning strategies makes pupils take responsibility for their learning, building confidence in the process. Moreover, creating a more accepting and non-threatening classroom can lessen the fear of being judged and allow more students to participate. In this case, instructors may facilitate this by demonstrating tolerance to mistakes, providing feedback which is helpful, and encouraging participation through the use of exercises which do not carry high stakes (Phulpoto, Oad, & Imran, 2024).

The existing body of work associated with ELA illustrates the intricate interrelation between psychological, social, and educational factors that are responsible for it. Although many studies have been published documenting the causes and effects of ELA, there is an emerging need to conduct more research within specific contexts, such as Pakistan, where the English language has significant cultural and educational value (Khan & Mohammed, 2024). This study seeks to explore this context in an attempt to provide insight into the phenomena as well as effective strategies to cope with it through practitioners' coping aids. Ultimately, ELA is a concern that has to be addressed in order to enhance students' linguistic and academic abilities as well as their overall development in the context of modern-day globalization.

METHODOLOGY

Present study applied quantitative descriptive survey approach to identify the potential causes and coping mechanisms of English Language Anxiety (ELA) among university learners in Karachi, Pakistan. A sample comprising 300 undergraduate students from five selected universities, both public and private, was obtained using stratified random sampling so that the different academic disciplines, years, and levels of the students were represented. Data were captured using a structured questionnaire adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), which comprised sections on demographic data, ELA levels, and coping strategies. The computerized questionnaire was divided into two sections, where the first utilized a 5-point Likert scale for quantitative and close-ended questions, while the second was open-ended, designed to explore students' experiences and strategies in coping with ELA.

Questionnaires and surveys were shared in both paper and online forms to maximize response rates, and data were collected over a span of two months. All participants were informed of the study and its purpose, and consent was collected afterwards for ethical purposes. The ELA along with the coping strategies were summarized with frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations and afterwards analyzed by SPSS software. To explore the relationships of ELA with other variables such as social fear, self-confidence, and language abilities... correlation, t-tests, and ANOVA were used. Open-ended responses were thematically analyzed to identify peer support, language use, and positive self-talk as frequently mentioned coping strategies.

Always keeping in view ethical considerations, the participants were kept confidential, and anonymity was provided. Although robust findings were generated through the methodology used, external factors like response bias and the focus on Karachi-based universities pose concerns in the generalization of the findings. The mixed-method design proved to be useful in understanding the phenomenon of ELA and integrated language use anxiety for students, providing a basis for further investigations and intervention strategies.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	150	50%
	Female	150	50%
Age	18–20 years	120	40%
	21–23 years	150	50%
	24+ years	30	10%
University Type	Public	180	60%
	Private	120	40%
Discipline Language Proficiency	Engineering	60	20%
	Beginner	60	20%
	Intermediate	150	50%
	Advanced	90	30%
	Computer Science	60	20%
Year of Study	1st Year	90	30%
	2nd Year	90	30%
	3rd Year	90	30%
	4th Year	30	10%

There were 300 participants in the sample, whose gender distribution was equal, i.e. male and female students were both 50%. The largest group aged 21-23 years (50%) followed by 18-20 years (40%) whereas 24 years and older made up only 10%. As for students from different types of universities, 60% of participants studied at public universities and 40% at private ones. The sample was equally divided in terms of five areas of study: Engineering, Social Sciences, Business, Medicine, and Computer Science with each of them having 20% of the total sample. Out of all the participants, 30% were in their 1st, 2nd and 3rd years, while 10% were in their 4th year. The percentage distribution of language proficiency was as follows: intermediate (50% students), advanced (30% students) and beginner (20% students).

The demographic profile in question enables one to maximize sample diversity along important attributes such as gender, age, type of university, discipline and language skills. These factors collectively reinforce the possibility of generalizing the results across the entire population of university students in Pakistan.

1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for ELA Levels and Causes

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
ELA Level	3.45	0.89	1.00	5.00
Fear of Negative Evaluation	4.12	0.76	2.00	5.00
Lack of Confidence	3.78	0.82	1.00	5.00
Inadequate Proficiency	3.25	0.91	1.00	5.00
Cultural Factors	2.89	0.95	1.00	5.00

The students' average score in ELA is observed to be 3.45 (SD = 0.89), which means their anxiety was moderated to above average. Students scored the highest in Fear of Negative Evaluation (M = 4.12, SD = 0.76) revealing that it is the major factor contributing to ELA. Other factors like not having enough belief in oneself and not being proficient in skills also recorded moderate to high means, but not as much as cultural factors (M = 2.89, SD = 0.95) which recorded low cultural factors means.

2. Correlation Analysis

Table 2: Correlations Between ELA and Its Causes

Variable	ELA Level	Fear of Negative Evaluation	Lack of Confidence	Inadequate Proficiency	Cultural Factors
ELA Level	1.00				
Fear of Negative Evaluation	.72**	1.00			
Lack of Confidence	.65**	.58**	1.00		
Inadequate Proficiency	.61**	.54**	.49**	1.00	
Cultural Factors	.38**	.32**	.29**	.26**	1.00

Note: **p < .01.

ELA ratios demonstrated ELA had the highest outcome relevance with a fear of negative evaluation of $r = .72$, $p < .01$, inadequate confidence $r = .65$, $p < .01$ and inadequate self-efficacy $r = .61$, $p < .01$. ELA ratios also revealed cultural factors, while still being relevant, had lower relevance outcome correlations with ELA x ELA ratios of $r = .38$, $p < .01$. It appears that a fear of negative evaluation was the strongest predictor of ELA, followed by self-reporting lack of confidence and inadequate skills.

3. Group Comparisons

Table 3: Independent Samples t-test for ELA Levels by Gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Male	150	3.25	0.85	-3.12	.002**
Female	150	3.65	0.92		

Note: ** $p < .01$.

Compared to male students ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 0.85$), female students reported significantly higher ELA levels ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 0.92$), $t(298) = -3.12$, $p = .002$. Thus, gender seems to make a difference in ELA with females exhibiting higher anxiety.

Table 4: One-Way ANOVA for ELA Levels by Discipline

Discipline	N	Mean	SD	F	p
Engineering	60	3.50	0.88	4.56	.001**
Social Sciences	60	3.70	0.91		
Business	60	3.30	0.85		
Medicine	60	3.40	0.89		
Computer Science	60	3.20	0.82		

Note: ** $p < .01$.

Variations across disciplines produced a notable difference in ELA levels, $F(4, 295) = 4.56$, $p = .001$. Post-hoc tests (Tukey's HSD) showed that students belonging to Social Sciences had significantly higher ELA levels than students in Computer Science ($p < .01$).

4. Regression Analysis

Table 5: Multiple Linear Regression Predicting ELA Levels

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Fear of Negative Evaluation	0.45	0.07	0.52	6.43	.000**
Lack of Confidence	0.32	0.06	0.38	5.33	.000**
Inadequate Proficiency	0.28	0.05	0.31	5.60	.000**
Cultural Factors	0.15	0.04	0.18	3.75	.000**

Note: $R^2 = .68$, ** $p < .01$.

The model of regression accounted for 68 per cent of the variability of the ELA levels ($R^2 = .68$, $p < 0.01$). The strongest predictor was fear of negative evaluation ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$), followed by lack of confidence ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$), and inadequate proficiency ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.01$). Cultural factors contributed as well, however their effect was less prominent ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.01$).

5. Chi-Square Test

Table 6: Chi-Square Test for Coping Strategies by Gender

Coping Strategy	Male	Female	χ^2	p
Peer Support	80	100	6.25	.012*
Language Practice	90	85	0.45	.502
Positive Self-Talk	70	95	8.33	.004**
Seeking Help	60	75	3.75	.053

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

There was unequal usage of coping strategies across different genders. Compared to male students, female students were more inclined to utilize peer assistance ($\chi^2 = 6.25$, $p = .012$) and positive self-talk ($\chi^2 = 8.33$, $p = .004$). In relation to seeking assistance and practicing a foreign language, there was no difference.

6. Reliability Analysis

Table 7: Reliability of the ELA Scale

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha
ELA Scale	0.89

The ELA scale predicts English language anxiety with outstanding reliability as indicated by an internal consistency score of 0.89.

7. Qualitative Analysis

Table 8: Frequency of Coping Strategies

Coping Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Peer Support	180	60%
Language Practice	175	58%
Positive Self-Talk	165	55%
Seeking Help	135	45%

The leading coping strategy selected was peer support at 60%, followed by language practice at 58% and self-talk at 55%. The least exercised strategy was seeking help at 45%.

The data shows that fear of being negatively evaluated is the most powerful predictor of ELA, followed by low confidence and low skill level. As for the results, younger women and those in Social Sciences reported exceptionally higher levels of ELA. The regression model proved that these factors combined explain a great deal of the variation in ELA. Positive self-talk and peer support as a coping strategy were commonly used, albeit with some variation based on gender. These findings call for more focus when designing interventions that address ELA in particular, worrying about negative evaluation and effective coping strategies need particular attention.

DISCUSSION

The results from this study add to the understanding of the phenomenon of English Language Anxiety (ELA) prevalent in higher educational institutions in Pakistan, with special reference to Karachi. The findings show that fear of being negatively evaluated is the single most important dimension of ELA, followed by lack of self-confidence and low proficiency in the language (Irshad, Malik, & Sarfraz, 2023; Afzal, Khan, & Sikandar, 2023). These outcomes are consistent with past studies that have found that fear of negative evaluation has been a dominant reason

for language anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). The high correlation between ELA and fear of negative evaluation indicates that students are overly concerned about being assessed by their peers and teachers, which leads to avoidance behaviors and low classroom participation (Malik, Sarfraz, & Seemal, 2021). This is important in the Pakistani context because the use of English is often linked to social status and academic achievement, which places even more stress on students (Irshad, Malik, & Sarfraz, 2023; Afzal, Khan, & Sikandar, 2023; Shehzad, Khan, & Noor, 2023; Malik, Sarfraz, & Seemal, 2021).

The same study found that female students reported their ELA as much greater than that of males. This could be a manifestation of gender differences resulting from cultural norms and expectations that women are under to perform well academically (Akhtar, & Khan, 2021). It is also possible that young female students suffer from greater anxiety regarding the possibility of making a mistake in public and therefore, they control their speech more extensive (Imran, Sultana, & Ahmed, 2023). The higher utilization of ELA by students of Social Sciences compared to those of Computer Science and Engineering may stem from the fact that Social Science subjects are more participative and require advanced English in both speech and writing extensive (Imran, Zaidi, & Rehan, 2024; Imran, Sultana, & Ahmed, 2023). On the other hand, within technical disciplines, there is assumed to be a weaker focus on language proficiency and a stronger emphasis on practically needed skills, thus relieving students of extreme performance pressure.

The coping mechanisms established in the research, which include positive self-talk, peer assistance, and language learning, illustrate the anxiety management skills of the students (Ali, et al., 2019). Out of all the strategies offered, peer support was reported the most, which indicates that students are more willing to participate in collaborative activities where they are free to practice English without fear of being ridiculed extensive (Imran, Zaidi, & Rehan, 2024). There were also high levels of reporting regarding language practice both in and outside the classroom, which implies that anxiety experienced in relation to speaking English can diminish over time with increased confidence as students are more frequently exposed to the language (Haq, 2012; Khattak et al., 2011). Khattak et al., (2011), also discussed that positive self-talk, which was hardly mentioned, appeared to be effective in counteracting negative self-talk and developing a more positive self-perception. These insights underline the fact that schools have an obligation to provide a supportive environment where students can practice the English language and access materials that will advance their levels of competence in English (Khan, Toor & ul Haq 2018; Haq, 2012).

The analysis showed that the fear of receiving negative feedback, self-doubt, and low skill levels together account for a significant portion of the variances in the students' ELA Levels. This highlights how complex ELA is and how every aspect needs to be addressed, including the psychological and humanistic angles involved in learning a language (Ali, et al., 2019; Shahzadi, Khan, Toor & ul Haq 2018; Haq, 2012; Khattak et al., 2011). Imran and Akhtar (2023) study for example, teaching students anxiety management skills like mindfulness or relaxation techniques adds value to the curriculum since it helps students manage their anxiety. Additionally,

providing language supportive programs and workshops on how to learn a new language can help students gain some measure of control over their learning, which in turn increases their confidence.

IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY (HAMEED & AKHTAR, 2023).

Considering the complete findings of this study, there are important implications for practitioners, policymakers, and learners (Ali, et al., 2019). Instructing teachers brings further benefits as teachers should strive to create more supportive and inclusive environments in the classrooms which students need for practising English without judgement. Guiding instructors are also recommended to reduce ELA by adopting positive attitudes towards mistakes and generally fostering low-fear environments. Students' confidence and anxiety can also be improved by having them work collaboratively through group discussions, peer-reviewed language activities, or games.

For policymakers, the findings of this study demonstrate the need to integrate ELA within institutional frameworks. The English language support programmes at the university level should include language labs, tutoring, and workshops focusing on learning strategies. These programmes can greatly alleviate students' concerns regarding English proficiency as well as English language anxiety. Lastly, policymakers should change their approach to language education and place more focus on teaching communicative skills rather than using memorisation techniques. This enables the students to use English pragmatically and proficiently in real-life situations.

Students should, therefore, recognise the effective coping mechanisms that could address unwanted ELA symptoms. Searching for supportive peers to practise language, as well as self-encouragement, are practical tools to mitigate anxiety and increase overall confidence. Assistance from teachers and language labs should also be solicited whose primary aim is to educate students on language skill usage. In overcoming ELA, students can achieve academic and professional success through proactivity in their language learning.

The study also holds significance for language education in Pakistan in general. Since English is unarguably important for higher education and the international job market, dealing with ELA is pivotal so that students are ready in terms of language skills. With help of reducing ELA, educational institutions can enable students to reach their maximum potential which will subsequently progress the country's socio-economic conditions.

FUTURE DIRECTION

This is one of the studies that shed light on ELA in the context of Pakistani university students, but there are several avenues that can be pursued in the future. To begin with, how ELA changes over time and how it affects the academic and professional career of students can be studied through longitudinal studies. For example, longitudinally tracking students from their first year to graduation can determine whether ELA is reduced with increased exposure to English or whether it remains a barrier to success.

Next, the role that technology can play in lessening ELA has not been researched. As people seeking online language learning portals, virtual language labs, and mobile applications have

startlingly increased, these devices can aid students in need of practice and those who want to learn through different means. Exploring the use of these devices in lessening ELA can add new dimensions to innovative language learning programs.

Thirdly, cross-cultural comparison of English language acquisition in Pakistani students with other ELA contexts where English is not the first language spoken could help discover similarities and differences. These studies may shed light on factors that impact ELA – culture or context – in Pakistan and guide the development of interventions that are appropriate to the cultural sensitivities of the country.

Fourthly, more studies could focus on how the reduction of ELA can be traced back to the training of teachers. Teachers bear the primary responsibility for the students' language learning experience; hence, training them to eliminate ELA can greatly benefit the students. For instance, teachers can be trained to bear in mind the use of a supportive classroom environment, constructive feedback, and other techniques that relieve anxiety during teaching, all of which can similarly lessen ELA.

Lastly, qualitative studies can provide information about how students experience ELA and the coping strategies they employ. Some of the psychosocial aspects of ELA which may not be captured in quantitative surveys could be accessed through in-depth interviewing or focus group discussions. These findings should lead to more effective approaches with an expansion of the focus beyond the cognitive side to the whole cognitive and emotional balance needed for language learning.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, this paper presents the problematic impact that English Language Anxiety has on university students in Pakistan and identifies important causes of this problem. Overarching these findings, further emphasise the call for comprehensive measures which consider the psychological and linguistic dimensions of ELA, as well as sufficient ELA enabling environments in which students can freely speak English without being judged. There is a dire need for Pakistan's ELA problems to be collaboratively resolved by educators, policymakers, and even the students themselves in order to improve language learning efforts to harness the full potentials of the future workforce of Pakistan. This is an ELA problem, and a problem where learners of English need to be able to speak English with confidence without a great deal of fear of being impeded. Further studies need to establish emerging pragmatic measures for mediating ELA in a wide range of circumstances.

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