

Investigating Foreign Language Anxiety: A Constructivist Approach and Thematic Analysis among Graduate Students from Rural and Urban Areas of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

People who are learning or using a foreign language frequently suffer foreign language anxiety (FLA), which shows up as tense and uneasy sensations in a variety of contexts, including social situations and classrooms. The purpose of this study was to investigate the distinction between linguistic anxiety among Pakistani graduate students in both urban and rural places. One male and one female graduate student from both rural and urban locations were interviewed as part of a qualitative study approach. To find trends and themes, the interviews were coded, transcribed, and examined. Furthermore, the influence of these social elements was emphasized by the thematic analysis conducted under the study approach put forward by Braun and Clarke. The results show that societal, environmental, and educational factors interact in a complex way worsen FLA. Due to limited exposure, anxiety levels are higher among students in rural areas.

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Introduction

The fear, trepidation, or uneasiness people experience when learning or using a foreign language is known as foreign language anxiety (FLA). This kind of anxiety can happen in a number of contexts, including social situations, the classroom, or any situation that calls for the employment of another language besides one's mother tongue. One should observe that the sensations of tension and trepidation that are specific to second language situations are what define foreign language anxiety (Horwitz et al, 1986). According to (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994) language anxiety has minor effects on the cognitive processes involved in learning a second language. They stress that anxiety can interfere with cognitive processes including concentration, memory, and problem-solving, which can hinder the production and acquisition of foreign languages. The study highlights how anxious learners usually struggle to create phrases and retrieve terminology, which impairs their overall language proficiency. Thus, studying a foreign language is crucial for education in today's globalized culture since it enables successful cross-cultural and cross-national interaction. However, acquiring a second language is not simple, and foreign language anxiety (FLA) is a significant challenge that many students encounter.

Literature Review

According to numerous studies examining its many facets and effects, learning English as a foreign language has always been problematic for Pakistani pupils since they are only exposed to the language in language lessons. Most students express their anxiety and worries about learning English as a second language. When we talk about "language anxiety," we mean the uneasiness that comes with learning a foreign language. Anxiety and language acquisition in general and in the classroom have long been linked by researchers and linguists who study second and foreign languages. Students experience anxiety when speaking English in school, college, and university, according to several studies. The experiences Pakistani students have described regarding their attempts to learn English as a second and foreign language are consistent with Scovel's (1987) definition of anxiety, which is a feeling of apprehension and vague fear. According to Awan et al. (2009) students with less educated or illiterate parents experience higher levels of anxiety than students with educated parents. According to Awan et al. (2009), language anxiety has a detrimental impact on students' scores and has a negative impact on their accomplishment. When it comes to gender inequalities, male pupils perform better academically and show less anxiety. Anxiety can range from high to low levels. The effect of English language anxiety on engineering students in Punjab, India, was examined by Kaur et al. (2013). The findings demonstrated that learning English is challenging for engineering students. Shahnaz et al. (2014) looked at the connection between Pakistani undergraduate students' English language proficiency and their English language anxiety. The results showed a negative relationship between English language achievement and anxiety. Gopang et al. (2015) investigated university students in Pakistan who

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were anxious about foreign languages. The results show that students' anxiety levels towards studying English as a foreign language range from moderate to high, and that male and female students' anxiety levels are equal. There is no statistically significant difference in anxiety levels by gender, according to Gopang et al. (2015). The study indicates that both men and women have relatively high levels of anxiety when speaking English. Sabbah (2018) emphasized the prevalence of English language anxiety by stating that students looked at the potential causes of worry that college students learning English as a second language might encounter. The results showed that when studying English as a second language, students felt a lot of worry. In a detailed examination of gender inequalities, Fatima et al. (2020) found differences in speaking anxiety levels among Pakistani students. Male students are said to feel less anxious than their female fellows. English anxiety is common among Pakistani students in a variety of academic fields and socioeconomic backgrounds, according to research. To create workable strategies for lowering anxiety and enhancing language learning outcomes in this circumstance, it is critical to understand its sources, impacts, and gender dynamics.

Problem Statement

It has been noted that FLA is a common problem among students that seriously hinders their academic progress. The research on the difference between foreign language anxiety, the causes contributing to FLA and its impact on the participation of graduate students in the classroom, from rural and urban areas of Pakistan, remains unexplored. The current study, consequently, intends to evaluate the comparison of FLA, the factors that lead to the FLA and its influence on classroom participation among graduate students from rural and urban locations of Pakistan.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the causes of FLA among Pakistani students from rural and urban areas.
2. To investigate how students from Pakistan's rural and urban areas participate in class discussions while they are experiencing anxiety related to a foreign language.
3. To find out how common FLA is among Pakistani graduate students from both urban and rural areas.

Research Question

1. What environmental, educational, and sociocultural elements influence FLA in Pakistani graduates from both rural and urban areas?
2. How do students from Pakistan's rural and urban areas participate in class discussions when they are anxious about a foreign language?
3. How do graduate students in Pakistan's rural and urban areas differ in their anxiety about foreign languages?

Methodology

The nature of the current study is qualitative. The goal of qualitative technique is to improve understanding of why individuals behave in certain ways and why social situations are the way they are. It began to perceive the researcher as a subjective individual whose opinions are important to the study. The social self, or the researcher's position in society, is thus more self-consciously realized (Pathak et al, 2013). To gather information, graduate students were interviewed. Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke's theme analysis was employed in this study to examine the information gathered. The goal of thematic analysis is to find patterns (themes) in the data set by methodically coding, classifying, and organizing the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Limitations

It's possible that the sample size is too small to extrapolate the results to all graduate students in Pakistan's cities and villages. Lack of self-awareness or social desirability or biasness may cause participants to underreport their anxiety levels. Survey questions may be interpreted differently by various students, which could result in inconsistent findings.

Theoretical Framework

We have applied a constructivist theoretical framework, enriched by Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory, to analyze the FLA of graduate students from both urban and rural areas. Constructivism emphasizes the socially mediated nature of knowledge, asserting that meaning is actively constructed by individuals and groups rather than being inherent in texts, events, or objects (Crotty, 1998). Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory further complements this perspective by highlighting the role of social interaction and cultural background in cognitive development.

Data Analysis

The researchers transcribed the data collected from the interviews consisting of five questions. The participants include one male and one female graduate student from rural and urban areas. Therefore, the thematic analysis of the data using Braun and Clark's model (2006) is as follows:

Table 1.

Thematic analysis of data provided in questions of male interviewee

S.No	Data	Codes	Themes				
1.	In my opinion, Rural institutions focus on writing and grammar, whereas urban institutions emphasize speaking. Also they organize events and do competitions that enhance students' confidence in controlling language anxiety. Moreover, In rural areas, students are demotivated by fees and lack of teachers' expertise in teaching methods. Urban institutions, however, emphasis on speaking and motivate students through feedback, participation, and rewards for speaking, writing, and creative English language activities.	<table><tr><th>Rural areas</th><th>Urban areas</th></tr><tr><td> - Focus on writing and grammar - Demotivation by fee - lack of teachers' expertise in teaching methods </td><td> - Emphasis on speaking - Organize events and do competitions - Motivation through Feedback, participation, and rewards for speaking, writing and creative ESL activities. </td></tr></table>	Rural areas	Urban areas	- Focus on writing and grammar - Demotivation by fee - lack of teachers' expertise in teaching methods	- Emphasis on speaking - Organize events and do competitions - Motivation through Feedback, participation, and rewards for speaking, writing and creative ESL activities.	The speaker is comparing how different approaches of teaching methodologies in language learning affects the language anxiety between rural and urban educational institutions of Pakistan.
Rural areas	Urban areas						
- Focus on writing and grammar - Demotivation by fee - lack of teachers' expertise in teaching methods	- Emphasis on speaking - Organize events and do competitions - Motivation through Feedback, participation, and rewards for speaking, writing and creative ESL activities.						

2.	Well, as per my level of understanding there are a significant number of socio-cultural factors in rural and urban areas that significantly contribute to language anxiety. In rural areas mostly economic constraints, poor internet connectivity and lack of access to digital devices hampers learners' ability to master a language. Hence they feel anxious when using a foreign language. In contrast, in urban institutions, students constantly compare themselves with the fluent speakers. Also, the competitive nature of urban life intensifies pressure on individuals to perform well in the target language, which leads to increased language anxiety.	Socio-cultural factors contributing to language anxiety among the graduate students of rural and urban areas of Pakistan <table><tr><th>Rural areas</th><th>Urban areas</th></tr><tr><td> ● Economic constraints ● Poor internet connectivity ● Lack of access to digital devices </td><td> ● Social comparison ● High expectation and competition </td></tr></table>	Rural areas	Urban areas	● Economic constraints ● Poor internet connectivity ● Lack of access to digital devices	● Social comparison ● High expectation and competition	Here the speaker explores how socio-cultural barriers such as economic constraints, lack of internet or digital platforms and social pressure to perform contribute to the language anxiety among the graduate students of rural and urban areas of Pakistan.
Rural areas	Urban areas						
● Economic constraints ● Poor internet connectivity ● Lack of access to digital devices	● Social comparison ● High expectation and competition						

3.	To be honest, I think that the graduate students from rural areas of Pakistan mostly lack resources such as textbooks, audiovisual materials, and language learning materials. Moreover, the lack of exposure to the language and the poor ability to practice outside the classroom promote their foreign language anxiety. On the other hand, the graduate students from urban areas of Pakistan often have competitive academic environments with high expectations for performance. This pressure to excel academically, particularly in subjects like foreign languages, can contribute to anxiety among students. In addition to that, Urban areas mostly have larger class sizes due to population density, which can lead to less individualized attention from teachers. Students may feel anxious about speaking up in class or making mistakes in front of a large group of peers.	Educational factors contributing to language anxiety among the graduate students of rural and urban areas of Pakistan <table><tr><th>Rural areas</th><th>Urban areas</th></tr><tr><td> ● Lack of resources such as limited text books ,audiovisual materials, and language learning materials ● Lack of exposure to the language ● Poor ability to practice outside the classroom </td><td> ● Competitive academic environments with high expectations for performance ● Large class sizes ● Less individualized attention from teacher ● Fear of making mistakes </td></tr></table>	Rural areas	Urban areas	● Lack of resources such as limited text books ,audiovisual materials, and language learning materials ● Lack of exposure to the language ● Poor ability to practice outside the classroom	● Competitive academic environments with high expectations for performance ● Large class sizes ● Less individualized attention from teacher ● Fear of making mistakes	Here the speaker is highlighting the key educational factors such as the lack of resources, in the rural areas, and the competitive environment along with the lack of support in urban areas that exacerbate language anxiety among the graduate students of Pakistan.
Rural areas	Urban areas						
● Lack of resources such as limited text books ,audiovisual materials, and language learning materials ● Lack of exposure to the language ● Poor ability to practice outside the classroom	● Competitive academic environments with high expectations for performance ● Large class sizes ● Less individualized attention from teacher ● Fear of making mistakes						

4.	I personally believe that in rural areas, the linguistic environment primarily revolves around the local dialect or language, with limited exposure to the foreign language. In the same way, the students of rural areas experience anxiety about speaking the foreign language due to fear of not adhering to cultural norms. In contrast, Urban areas are often diverse, with people from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In such environments, students may feel pressure to perform well in the foreign language, on top of that, while urban environments may offer more opportunities for exposure to the foreign language through media, social interactions, and multicultural communities, this exposure can also heighten foreign language anxiety.	Environmental factors contributing to language anxiety among the graduate students of rural and urban areas of Pakistan <table><tr><th>Rural areas</th><th>Urban areas</th></tr><tr><td> - Limited linguistic environment - Fear of not adhering to the cultural norms </td><td> - Rich linguistic background, creating pressure and foreign language anxiety - Excessive exposure to foreign language through social media can heighten FLA. </td></tr></table>	Rural areas	Urban areas	- Limited linguistic environment - Fear of not adhering to the cultural norms	- Rich linguistic background, creating pressure and foreign language anxiety - Excessive exposure to foreign language through social media can heighten FLA.	The speaker argues that environmental factors impede language proficiency and enhance language anxiety among graduate students from rural and urban areas of Pakistan
Rural areas	Urban areas						
- Limited linguistic environment - Fear of not adhering to the cultural norms	- Rich linguistic background, creating pressure and foreign language anxiety - Excessive exposure to foreign language through social media can heighten FLA.						
5.	In my opinion, Foreign language anxiety impacts the participation of graduate students from both rural and urban areas of Pakistan in classroom discussions in a significant way. Graduate students from rural areas may be more hesitant to participate in classroom discussions due to FLA, fear of making mistakes, and limited confidence in their language skills. However students from urban areas may be more likely to participate in classroom discussions due to increased confidence in their language skills and a more supportive learning environment.	Impacts of foreign language anxiety on the classroom participation of graduate students from rural and urban areas of Pakistan. <table><tr><th>Rural areas</th><th>Urban areas</th></tr><tr><td> - Lower participation in the classroom discussion - Fear of making mistakes - Limited confidence </td><td> - More participation in the classroom discussion - Increased confidence - More supportive environment </td></tr></table>	Rural areas	Urban areas	- Lower participation in the classroom discussion - Fear of making mistakes - Limited confidence	- More participation in the classroom discussion - Increased confidence - More supportive environment	The speaker proposes that because of foreign language anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and limited confidence, the graduates from rural areas of Pakistan participate comparatively less than that of urban areas.
Rural areas	Urban areas						
- Lower participation in the classroom discussion - Fear of making mistakes - Limited confidence	- More participation in the classroom discussion - Increased confidence - More supportive environment						

Table. 2

Thematic analysis of data provided in questions of female interviewee

S.No	Data	Codes	Themes				
1	In my opinion, in rural setting language exposure is quite different as compared to urban areas. Mostly students in rural areas speak primary language or use common dialects at their homes with less focus on the foreign language. This limited exposure to the foreign language creates FLA among the graduate students when they come to urban settings. In contrast, students from urban areas have rich exposure to multiple languages. Along with that, frequent language programs and robust language practices contribute to a lesser FLA among the graduate students.	Differences between teaching methods of language learning between rural and urban educational institutions of Pakistan impacting foreign language anxiety of graduate students <table><tr><th>Rural areas</th><th>Urban areas</th></tr><tr><td> - Limited language exposure - Use primary language and common dialects </td><td> - Rich language exposure - Exposure to multiple language - Robust language practices </td></tr></table>	Rural areas	Urban areas	- Limited language exposure - Use primary language and common dialects	- Rich language exposure - Exposure to multiple language - Robust language practices	The speaker discusses the impact of rural versus urban language exposure on foreign language anxiety among graduate students.
Rural areas	Urban areas						
- Limited language exposure - Use primary language and common dialects	- Rich language exposure - Exposure to multiple language - Robust language practices						
2.	Socio-cultural factors significantly contribute to FLA among the graduate students of rural areas as compared to urban areas. One contributing factor is because of the constant comparison with people who are proficient in several languages that leads to increased feeling of foreign language anxiety. Furthermore, fear of negative feedback, ridicule, and fear of making mistakes cause more FLA among the graduate students of rural areas as compared to that of urban areas.	Socio-cultural factors contributing to language anxiety among the graduate students of rural and urban areas of Pakistan <table><tr><th>Rural areas</th><th>Urban areas</th></tr><tr><td> - Constant comparison - fear of negative feedback - Ridicule, - fear of making mistakes </td><td> - less comparison - Low fear of making mistakes, ridicule, so less FLA </td></tr></table>	Rural areas	Urban areas	- Constant comparison - fear of negative feedback - Ridicule, - fear of making mistakes	- less comparison - Low fear of making mistakes, ridicule, so less FLA	The speaker suggests that Socio-cultural factors contributing to higher foreign language anxiety (FLA) among rural graduate students compared to their urban counterparts.
Rural areas	Urban areas						
- Constant comparison - fear of negative feedback - Ridicule, - fear of making mistakes	- less comparison - Low fear of making mistakes, ridicule, so less FLA						

3.	I hate to say that Rural students often have fewer opportunities to interact with native speakers or immerse themselves in environments where the target language is spoken naturally. This lack of exposure leads to anxiety when they are required to use the language in real-life situations. Moreover, the use of traditional grammar-focused teaching methods, as opposed to communicative, interactive approaches, can increase anxiety. Students may feel less prepared for real-world language use if their instruction is overly theoretical.	Educational factors contributing to language anxiety among the graduate students of rural and urban areas of Pakistan <table><tr><th>Rural areas</th><th>Urban areas</th></tr><tr><td> ● Less interaction with native speakers ● Use of traditional grammar-focused teaching methods ● More theoretical instructions, so more FLA </td><td> ● More interaction with native speakers ● Use of communicative, interactive approaches ● More practical instructions , so less FLA </td></tr></table>	Rural areas	Urban areas	● Less interaction with native speakers ● Use of traditional grammar-focused teaching methods ● More theoretical instructions, so more FLA	● More interaction with native speakers ● Use of communicative, interactive approaches ● More practical instructions , so less FLA	The speaker highlighted the lack of immersive language exposure and traditional teaching methods contribute to increased foreign language anxiety among rural students.
Rural areas	Urban areas						
● Less interaction with native speakers ● Use of traditional grammar-focused teaching methods ● More theoretical instructions, so more FLA	● More interaction with native speakers ● Use of communicative, interactive approaches ● More practical instructions , so less FLA						
4.	Rural areas often have fewer opportunities for students to hear and use the target language outside of the classroom. This lack of immersion can lead to anxiety when students are required to use the language in real-world situations. In addition to that, Opportunities for language practice through clubs, language exchange programs, or cultural events may be scarce, reducing the chances for students to practice in a low-stakes environment	Environmental factors contributing to language anxiety among the graduate students of rural and urban areas of Pakistan <table><tr><th>Rural areas</th><th>Urban areas</th></tr><tr><td> ● fewer opportunities to hear and use the target language ● less language events such as clubs, language exchange programs, or cultural events, So more FLA </td><td> ● more opportunities to hear and use the target language ● More language events such as clubs, language exchange programs, or cultural events So less FLA </td></tr></table>	Rural areas	Urban areas	● fewer opportunities to hear and use the target language ● less language events such as clubs, language exchange programs, or cultural events, So more FLA	● more opportunities to hear and use the target language ● More language events such as clubs, language exchange programs, or cultural events So less FLA	The speaker emphasizes that limited language immersion and practice opportunities in rural areas contribute to increased foreign language anxiety among students.
Rural areas	Urban areas						
● fewer opportunities to hear and use the target language ● less language events such as clubs, language exchange programs, or cultural events, So more FLA	● more opportunities to hear and use the target language ● More language events such as clubs, language exchange programs, or cultural events So less FLA						

5.	The expectations and teaching styles of professors in urban-centric institutions may not align with the learning experiences of rural students, adding to their anxiety and reluctance to engage. Also Rural students might face financial barriers that limit their access to language learning resources, such as private tutors or study abroad programs, contributing to their anxiety.	Impacts of foreign language anxiety on the classroom participation of graduate students from rural and urban areas of Pakistan. <table><tr><th>Rural areas</th><th>Urban areas</th></tr><tr><td> ● Less engaging Teaching style ● Students' reluctance to engage in the classroom ● Financial barriers so more FLA </td><td> ● More engaging Teaching style ● More engagements in the classroom so less FLA </td></tr></table>	Rural areas	Urban areas	● Less engaging Teaching style ● Students' reluctance to engage in the classroom ● Financial barriers so more FLA	● More engaging Teaching style ● More engagements in the classroom so less FLA	The speaker discussed that mismatched expectations and teaching styles, along with financial barriers, contribute to increased foreign language anxiety among rural students in urban-centric institutions.
Rural areas	Urban areas						
● Less engaging Teaching style ● Students' reluctance to engage in the classroom ● Financial barriers so more FLA	● More engaging Teaching style ● More engagements in the classroom so less FLA						

Findings

The findings of the research highlight the notable differences in language exposure and FLA between students in rural and urban areas. Due to sociocultural variables including comparison with fluent speakers and fear of unfavorable comments, rural students who have had little exposure to foreign languages experience increased FLA when they move to urban areas. Furthermore, there are less opportunities for language practice in remote settings, which exacerbates anxiety. Financial constraints that restrict access to resources may exacerbate anxiety in rural pupils by causing urban-centric teaching methods to be out of step with their realities. In contrast to urban institutions that emphasis speaking abilities through a variety of activities, rural institutions place a higher priority on writing and grammar. While urban diversity may improve FLA, rural locations' lack of resources and economic constraints make language acquisition more difficult. The involvement of rural kids in the classroom is significantly impacted by FLA. The participation of rural students in class discussions is significantly impacted by FLA, underscoring the complex interplay of sociocultural, environmental, and educational elements in FLA among Pakistani graduate students.

Recommendations

Several important suggestions should be put into practice in order to improve the caliber and relevance of study on language anxiety among graduate students in Pakistan's rural and urban areas. First, making sure the participant pool is varied and expanding the sample size will improve. The findings' generalisability Incorporating students from diverse academic disciplines, socioeconomic backgrounds, and genders will yield a more thorough knowledge of language anxiety. A combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques, including focus groups, interviews, and standardized anxiety scales, should be used to reduce self-reporting bias. Confidentiality and anonymity should be maintained to promote truthful answers. It is imperative to increase representation and accessibility, especially in rural and isolated communities. Reaching these communities can be facilitated by using digital technologies or collaborating with nearby organizations. Furthermore, making certain that the sample reflects the diversity found in both urban and rural locations will give a more realistic picture of the problem. To ensure participant comprehension, cultural sensitivities must be taken into account when constructing research instruments and taking into account regional languages and dialects.

Conclusion

By highlighting the significant differences in FLA across graduate students in Pakistan's rural and urban areas, the study has shed light on the intricate interactions between sociocultural, environmental and educational elements that contribute to this concern. The main causes of rural students' increased FLA include a lack of exposure to foreign languages and fewer opportunities for real-world language use, which are exacerbated by sociocultural constraints including fear of unfavorable comments and comparisons with fluent speakers. These difficulties are exacerbated by the fact that, in sharp contrast to the more participatory and speaking-focused approaches common in metropolitan settings, educational systems in rural areas place a greater emphasis on theoretical knowledge than on communication skills. An additional source of worry is the discrepancy between rural students' educational experiences and the standards and pedagogical approaches of urban-centric institutions. Rural students are reluctant to participate in class activities because of financial limitations and limited access to language learning tools, which further hinder their capacity to develop their language proficiency. On the other hand, urban children gain from more varied exposure, a richer linguistic environment, and stronger language programs that support lower levels of FLA. Though not as much as for pupils in rural areas, the competitive and demanding metropolitan learning environment can nonetheless provide difficulties. The findings highlight the need for specialized interventions to address the particular difficulties faced by rural students. These interventions could include developing supportive teaching strategies, expanding access to resources for language learning, and putting in place bridge programs to facilitate their transfer to academic environments in cities. Educational institutions may create a more effective and inclusive learning environment by identifying and resolving these variables, which will eventually improve language learning experiences and lower FLA for all students.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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