English Language Speaking Anxiety among Afghan University Students

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Abstract

Background/purpose: English language plays an important role in Afghanistan higher education. Proficiency in English as the language of communication is becoming progressively important for the development of higher education. However, speaking in English is one of the anxiety provoking skills for most of Afghan learners. This study therefore aims to investigate Afghanistan undergraduate English and literature students' perceptions on foreign language speaking anxiety, and its components of communication apprehension (CA), fear of negative evaluation (FNE) and test anxiety (TA). **Method**: An adapted version of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and an interview protocol were used to investigate 302 Afghan students' foreign language anxiety. **Results/conclusion**: The findings suggested that the students experienced a moderate level of anxiety. The female students had higher level of foreign language anxiety (FLA) than male students. The study further revealed that CA was the highest factor which contribute to students' FLCAS. The study found no statistically significant differences between the university location and components of FLA. This means that the students either from Kabul as the capital or from Bamyan as a central province experienced FLA. Furthermore, the components of FLA significantly correlated to each other. The findings suggest facilitating short and long-term training for both teachers and students to employ effective strategies on reducing the level of anxiety in English language classes.

Keywords: foreign language, English, speaking, anxiety, student

1. Introduction

English as a dominant international language, and language of knowledge and technology has a very important role in all areas of human life. In Afghanistan, the importance of learning English as a foreign language is accepted as an important language (Ahmad, Hussan & Safiullah, 2018). Due to this, Afghanistan Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) states that proficiency in English, as the universal language of communication and language of the Internet, is becoming gradually important which requires improvement and development of the higher education in Afghanistan (MoHE, 2014). The MoHE encourages educational institutions, with respect to the national language, to boost the use of English in teaching and learning (MoHE, 2015-2020), and English is also among national priority disciplines. Moreover, Afghanistan Strategic Plan also clearly indicates the need to prepare and produce qualified and creative students for the future development of Afghanistan, and having appropriate English communication skills is essential.

Local-based international organizations and multinational corporations prefer hiring graduates who can build strong interpersonal relationships and approach people in an effective way. In this case, less anxious students are more proficient at communicating and performing using English language. It is very important for them to speak clearly and convey messages in a well-structured manner.

Studies conducted by some Afghan scholars, however, showed that speaking in English has been one of the difficult skills for most Afghan undergraduate students. Their findings revealed that students suffer from high level of anxiety for all three types of performance anxieties which are communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. They further indicated that many Afghan English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners can simply read and write English, but they have problems in speaking correctly and fluently. Speaking in English is not easy for most of these students, which cause low participation in language classroom activities. Students were afraid of

pronunciation mistakes, and worried in oral communication, and presentation. Anxiety limited their ability to speak fluently and decreased their self-confidence (Zia & Sulan, 2015; Anwari, 2019; Tahsildar & Kabiri, 2019).

Understanding English language speaking anxiety from student' perspectives would be beneficial to the pedagogical contexts and may be helpful to the vision of Afghanistan MoHE in deliberating the issue of English language proficiency and education at the higher education. This study therefore investigated English language speaking anxiety involving tertiary students. The findings of the study can help teachers to work on pedagogical strategies to decrease language speaking anxiety among Afghanistan university students. Influences of the moderating variables such as gender, university and relationship between these variables were also investigated. This study may provide detailed information on foreign language speaking anxiety and its effect on learners' performance with the final goal to curtail this debilitative psychological phenomenon.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Foreign Language Anxiety

In language learning, motivation, attitudes and anxiety are recognized as important and influential affective variables (Bhatti & Memon, 2016; Çağatay, 2015; Dörnyei, 2020). Generally, psychologists explained anxiety as a state of apprehension, an unclear fear that is indirectly connected with an object (Liu, 2018; MacIntyre, 2017). In teaching and learning, anxiety has different types such as state anxiety, trait anxiety, achievement anxiety, and facilitating-debilitating anxiety (Horwitz, 2010; Çağatay, 2015; Khattak, Jamshed, Ahmad & Baig, 2011; Dewey, Belnap & Steffen, 2018). Facilitating anxiety activates and facilitates the way for success, debilitating anxiety on other hand is a barrier for learner to succeed. A learner possesses both debilitating and facilitating anxiety (Jun Zhang, 2001), which needs to be appropriately addressed.

Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) described foreign language anxiety (FLA) as "a distinct complex construct of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of language learning process" (p. 128). FLA as an emotional factor can negatively affect students' perception and performance on foreign language learning. FLA is connected with feelings of fright, ambiguity, dread, disorders and worry with the situation in which the language is learned, like being in classes of English as foreign language (Sadighi & Dastpak, 2017). Horwitz et al. (1986) study's, among the prominent and earlier studies in FLA, revealed that foreign language learners had problems concentrating, become forgetful, sweat, and have palpitations. However, anxiety may also impact positively on learners' performance. When this occurs, anxiety can lead to attentiveness or alertness. In order for leaners to be successful in acquiring language input, they need to be attentive (Dubiner, 2019). Nevertheless, several studies conducted on the role of FLA in language acquisition, with a huge focus on adult learners of English as a foreign language show that quite numerous students experience anxiety in FL learning and that anxiety have constant negative impact on FL learning (Horwitz et al., 1986; Liu, 2018). Therefore, foreign language learning is anxiety provoking for most learners, and causes by several reasons.

2.2 Components of Foreign Language Anxiety

2.2.1 Communication Apprehension

Horwitz et al. (1986) defined communication apprehension (CA) as a type of shyness classified by worry or anxiety which happens in discussion or communication with peer or group of people. Learners who demonstrate CA has trouble in speaking especially in front of a large group of people. Learners who exhibit CA typically avoid taking part in the communication and even withdraw from discussion compared with those who do not have communication apprehension. This type of learners are reluctant to involve in discussion or conversation with others or to engage in social interactions (Toyama & Yamazaki, 2018). Ran, Wang and Zhu (2022) found that FLA has a substantial impact on listening and speaking. They further indicated that inadequate speaking ability is the main barrier in foreign language communication.

Therefore, communication in a foreign language stems from this knowledge that one has limited abilities in the target language and will almost certainly face difficulties both in comprehending and being understood by others. Conversely, commonly shy and reserved speakers while speaking in foreign language may have developed a different sense of self in the target language and feel as if they are not talking, but somebody else is talking and this results in a reduction of anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). In addition, CA is the concern that learners experience in oral communication (Alnahidh & Altalhab, 2020), for instance, in speaking activities, students may feel embarrass and worry to perform well. In this regard, communication apprehension is caused by personality traits such as shyness, calmness, and fear of making mistakes (Toubot & Seng, 2018). Shyness is the susceptibility to withdraw from or

prevent communication with other learners. Therefore, communication apprehension may occur in foreign language learning particularly in speaking activities.

2.2.2 Test Anxiety

Test anxiety (TA) is a performance anxiety which originates from an apprehension or fear of failure (Horwitz et al., 1986; Çağatay, 2015; Yalçın & İnceçay, 2014), for instance, students fear about failing to perform well. More anxious students often use ineffective strategies in language learning (Liu, 2018). They face with lack of learning or study skills to organize information or learning materials, and therefore, lead to their anxiety in performing well during assessments. One of the reasons for test anxiety is students' negative thoughts which developed as a result of low performance in the previous tests. Test anxious learners often put unrealistic believe that their performance should be perfect in test taking and less that is a failure (Bhatti & Memon,2016; Liu, 2018)). FLA is often seen in testing situations. Generally, students who met counsellors report that they know a specific grammar point but forget it while participating in a test or an oral activity. Due to nervousness, learners recognize, often after the test, that they understood the right answer but responded and selected the wrong one. During the test, anxiety and errors may make worse when students recognize that they are making avoidable errors (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Strong test anxiety threatens attention span because anxious feelings can occupy segments of the working memory required in problem solving (Zheng & Cheng, 2018). Test anxious students regard oral communication as a test condition rather than an opportunity to improve their communication skills (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009). In addition, there is consensus that learners with TA will face high levels of apprehension, nervousness and stress during language testing and evaluative conditions and this will importantly interfere with learners' attitude, action, emotional and behavioural well-being toward language learning or even school (Heng et al., 2012; Alnahidh & Altalhab, 2020). Therefore, TA can have a debilitating impact on learners' performance and should be dealt properly.

2.2.3 Fear of Negative Evaluation

Fear of negative evaluation (FNE) is defined as "apprehension about others' evaluation, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively" p:128. Fear of negative evaluation is a wider area because it is not restricted to test-taking environment, but it may happen in any situation such as during interviewing for a job or interacting in foreign language class (Horwitz et al., 1986; Toyama & Yamazaki, 2018; Wardhani, 2019). Learners who are concerned with FNE tend to be unsuccessful to start conversation or feel lack of ability to make suitable social impression (Liu, 2018; Karatas et al., 2016). In fact, they would avoid social interactions, just smile and nod politely or listen to others talk and only interact with occasional "uh-huh's".

For learners who experience fear of negative evaluation, making mistakes or errors is not considered as a natural part of the learning process, but they imagine as a threat and a source either from their teachers or peers. Therefore, most of the time, they are withdrawn, silent, and do not take active part in the language activities (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009). Learners become worried when they realize that they face with lack of the required linguistic competence to share their ideas, and they are concerned about sharing an inappropriate social impression about themselves (Balemir, 2009). Azizpour and Gholami (2022) indicated that fear of negative evaluation is the possible causes of foreign language classroom anxiety. Learners' fear of negative evaluation in the classroom further intensify when the teacher believe that his/her main role is to continuously correct learners' mistakes rather than to act as a facilitator. Even though, many learners believe that some mistakes correction is essential, the mode of correction is frequently reported as possibly provoking anxiety in students (Horwitz, 1988; Ohata, 2005). Teachers should make obvious that language learning involves making mistakes, and mistakes are not sign of failure, but a process of learning (Zheng & Cheng, 2018). As a result, fear of negative evaluation is an important factor to be considered in language teaching and learning.

2.3 Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

Anxiety is obviously an issue in language learning and has debilitating impact on communication in a foreign language such as English for some learners (Woodrow, 2006). For many foreign language learners, the mastery and proficiency of speaking skills in English is a priority. Thus, learners often assess their progress in language learning along with the effectiveness of their English learning materials based on how much they have grown in their spoken language proficiency (Richards, 2008). Several studies found that speaking in the foreign language classroom as intense anxiety provoking (Dubiner, 2019; Yalçın & İnceçay, 2014). Foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA) that experienced by learners may lead to their failure to learn the target language (Mukminin et al., 2015). For example, it has been indicated that anxious language learner spends a lot of time studying than relaxed learners, but their achievement does not exhibit and reflect that attempt (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994).

Toubot and Seng (2018) indicated several factors such as psychological, linguistic, and cultural factors which contribute to FL speaking anxiety. In low linguistic abilities, learner with insufficient linguistic knowledge such as pronunciation, grammar, and lexis tend to have high level of anxiety. Psychological factor is another important factor in which personality traits and L2 learning is closely connected. For instance, learners with extrovert traits are commonly happier to associate with others (Minghe & Yuan, 2013). Learners who are less anxious seems to be more confident and they are able to speak more fluently. Conversely, highly anxious learners use expressions in a nervous or tense way specially in an evaluative circumstance (Liu, 2018). Furthermore, Toubot and Seng (2018), Alnahidh and Altalhab (2020) found that students suffer from moderate to high level of FLA. Recently, Saghafi and Shirvan (2020) found that patterns of anxiety were not the same among the learners and within the same learner in the speaking tasks. Therefore, the causes of foreign language anxiety can be different among the learners, but effective approaches should be employed to reduce the level of anxiety.

2.4 Approaches to Reduce Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

Several helpful strategies on reducing language anxiety in the classroom have been suggested by researchers. Teachers can provide interesting discussion, ask students to work in pairs or groups, keep a calm attitude over error correction, applying self-talk, and attending in additional instructional activities and support groups, utilizing conversation cards to ask and answer each other, using games in language learning, employing relaxation techniques, and having a journal (Kayaoğlu & Sağlamel, 2013; Alnahidh & Altalhab, 2020). Trang et al. (2013) proposed professional development for teachers who teach foreign language in order to focus on teacher-student relationships, teachers' attitude, communications and behaviours with learners in the classroom should be offered because it assists improve teachers' caring for learner learning, and moreover supports to create a supportive teaching and learning setting for learners that reduces their anxiety.

Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009) recommended that teachers should not consider anxious students as lazy, lack of being motivated, and poor attitude. Instead they should recognize students and facilitate interventions to assist them overcome foreign language anxiety. In relation to this, teachers can integrate project work in which both anxious and non-anxious students can have enormous opportunities to speak more in English. Furthermore, Mukminin et al. (2015) indicated that educational policy makers, schools and teachers should enhance students' motivation, confidence, make them feel relaxed, and improve encouraging speaking classrooms. Recently, Xia Yu (2021) suggested these coping strategies to employ in daily teaching and learning of foreign language. Being a humorous teacher was found as the most essential strategy coping with learners' FL speaking anxiety. Constructing a friendly environment in speaking a FL, having a patient teacher in the classroom, and correcting students' mistakes indirectly are effective strategies in reducing their FLA. Learners need to be well prepared before speaking a foreign language, and asking students to work in small groups are useful techniques to decrease FLA. Therefore, use of these strategies may assist teachers to reduce FLA among students.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants and Design

The study was carried out with 302 undergraduate students recruited from three public universities in Afghanistan; Bamyan University (BU) is located in the central part of Afghanistan, in a rather rural area whereas, Kabul University (KU), and Kabul Education University (KEU) are located in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. The participants were students from the English and literature department.

Table 1. Distribution of Participants according to Location and Research Instruments.

Research Instrument	Bamyan University	Kabul University	Kabul Education University	Total
FLCAS	99	125	78	302
Open-ended online questionnaire	11	14	9	34

3.2 Research Instrument

Two research instruments were used. The first instrument is an adapted version of the Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), which examined participants' foreign language anxiety based on three components; communication apprehension (CA) comprises 11 items, test anxiety (TA) consisting of 15 items, and fear of negative evaluation (FNE) which comprises 7 items. The FLCAS asked students

to evaluate their language anxiety based 5 Likert-type scale from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). The FLCAS was pilot tested and four items were deleted from the original instrument due to low reliability value. The finalized version was analysed again for its reliability, and the Cronbach Alpha is .747, which is considered as acceptable value for consistency of the items in the instrument. The second research instrument is an open-ended questionnaire, which was originally intended as an interview protocol, but this had to be changed due to the spread of the Covid-19. The open-ended questionnaire was intended to probe further on students' foreign language anxiety, and it was administered through Google Form. The questionnaire was responded by 34 volunteer participants from all three universities. The data were classified and categorized based on themes.

3.3 Procedure

Data were collected in two phases. First, the main questionnaire was distributed in the class (offline). Second, due to covid-19, the open-ended questionnaire was shared online with the participants, and they responded. The data collection from each university took about 16 days. The permission was obtained from the head of department, and dean of faculty before students were given the questionnaire individually. Data of only the participants who agreed to participate in the study were included.

4. Findings

This section reports the findings of data gathered from three public universities in Afghanistan. The findings are presented based on descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, correlation, and ANOVA.

4.1 Findings of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale

4.1.1 Level of Foreign Language Anxiety

The FLCAS was employed to measure the level of students' foreign language anxiety and the findings are reported based on means and standard deviations.

Table 2. Level of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety among Afghan University Students

Anxiety components	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Communication Apprehension	301	3.09	4.63
Fear of Negative Evaluation	300	3.02	5.04
Test Anxiety	301	2.97	5.08

Table 2 illustrates that the component of FLA with the highest mean is communication apprehension (3.09), whereas the lowest mean is test anxiety (3.02). The total mean score (3.033) shows moderate level of anxiety among the participants.

4.1.2 Analysis of Variance Comparing Components of the FLA and Location of the Students

A one-way between groups analysis of variance was employed to explore the impact of university location on components of FLA. Table 3 shows the analysis of variance for components of language anxiety and locations of the university, and Table 4 illustrates the means and standard deviations of this analysis. A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to measure the impact of university location on components of language anxiety, as measured by CA, FNE and TA. Participants from three universities were recruited to participate, Kabul university and Kabul Education University are located in the capital, whereas Bamyan University is located in the central part of Afghanistan. Universities in Kabul have a lot of teaching and learning facilities and equipment to compare with the university in central part of Afghanistan. The findings show that there was no statistically significant difference at the *p<.001* level in language anxiety scores for all three universities: $F_{(2, 295)} = 1.443$, p = .23. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test revealed that mean score for Kabul University (M= 88.82, SD= 12.229) was not significantly different from Kabul Education University (M=86.05, SD= 10.673). The mean score for Bamyan University (M= 88.45, SD= 11.829) was not significantly different from the two universities in Kabul. The findings reveal that regardless of the location of the university, rural or urban of Afghanistan, students' language anxiety towards English is similar.

Table 3. Analysis of Variance Results for Components of Language Anxiety according to the University

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	396.016	2	198.008	1.443	.238
Within Groups	40483.930	295	137.234		
Total	40879.946	297			

Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations Comparing University Location and Components of FLA

University	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Kabul University	124	88.82	12.22
Kabul Education University	77	86.05	10.67
Bamyan University	97	88.45	11.82

4.1.3 T-test Analysis in Comparing the Components of FLA and Gender

An independent-samples t-test was carried out to compare the mean difference between male and female participants against the components of the FLA.

Table 5. T-test Analysis of Gender Difference for FLA

Gender	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Male	140	87.36	12.41	-.87	296	.23
Female	158	88.54	11.10	-.86	281.01	

Table 5 depicts the analysis of T-test on the mean difference between male and female students on their FLA. An independent samples t-test was carried out to compare FLA scores for males and females. There was no significant difference in scores for males (M= 87.36, SD = 12.41) and females (M = 88.54, SD = 11.10; t (296) = -.87, p = .23, two-tailed). It seems that both male and female participants experienced FLA. The finding illustrates that female students' foreign language anxiety is higher than male students.

4.1.4 Correlation between Components of Foreign Language Anxiety

The correlation between the components of FLA were found and shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Correlation between Components of Foreign Language Anxiety

		CA	FNE	TA
CA	Pearson Correlation	–		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	301		
FNE	Pearson Correlation	.436**	–	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
	N	299	300	
TA	Pearson Correlation	.448**	.463**	–
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	300	299	301

Table 6 illustrates that there is a statistically significant correlation (p < .001) between the three components of foreign language anxiety. The findings show that these components are interrelated to each other. The relationship between the components of the foreign language anxiety, i.e., communication apprehension (CA), fear of negative evaluation (FNE) and test anxiety (TA) were investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity. There was a strong positive correlation between CA and FNE, r = .43, n = 299, p < .001. Similar results were obtained for relationships between CA and TA, and FNE and TA. The correlation between CA and TA indicate a strong positive relationship, r = .44, n = 300, p < .001, and a strong positive relationship between FNE and TA, r = 46, n = 299, p < .001.

4.2 Findings of the Open-ended Questionnaire

In addition to the quantitative survey, an online open-ended questionnaire was administered to 34 volunteered

participants to get a better understanding from the participants on the level and causes of foreign language speaking anxiety. The responses were coded based on the following codes: ST- student, 1- student's number, BU- refers to the university. As a result, ST1BU refers to student 1 from Bamyan University; ST14KU- refers to student 14 from Kabul University; and ST25KEU- refers to Kabul Education University. The results of the open-ended questionnaire are important to support the findings of closed-ended questionnaire on students' English as a foreign language anxiety. Based on the findings of the open-ended questionnaire, more than half of the participants indicated that they had communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety. The findings also show that most of the participants had similar perceptions on English language anxiety. The findings were analysed based on three components of foreign language anxiety i.e., communication apprehension (CA), fear of negative evaluation (FNE), and test anxiety (TA).

4.2.1 Communication Apprehension

The participants indicated that they have communication apprehension i.e., "*I feel sad, bored and frighten when I do not understand what the teacher say in English.*" as indicated by these participants:

ST7BU　　　*I feel a little sad because English language is my major and still cannot understand the meaning of words that teachers say in the class.*

ST14KU　　*When I was freshman, I couldn't understand my Profs fully and fear to ask them to explain again, but now as a senior student I can ask for further clarification.*

ST15KU　　*I feel perplexed when I don't understand what teacher say in English, try to pay more attention to what the teacher says, and I also try to understand from his/her gestures and the context.*

ST25KEU　*Sometimes I feel frighten when I don't understand what my teacher says in English specially when I was in the first class.*

Participants revealed differing views when their mistakes or errors were corrected by the teacher. Some of the participants indicated feelings of anxiety especially when treatments were harsh, for instance:

ST1BU　　　*I feel nervous when teacher corrects my errors in the class.*

ST11BU　　*I lose my face if he corrects me in front of others.*

ST18KU　　*Actually, it depends on how the teacher corrects my mistakes. For example, one of my teachers corrects students' mistakes aggressively which makes me nervous because we are here to learn and to be corrected.*

However, there are also students who were glad that their mistakes and errors were corrected.

ST30KEU　*I become so happy when my teacher corrects my mistakes.*

ST13KU　　*I accept teacher's correction all the times and appreciate it.*

ST5BU　　　*I will be happy when the teacher corrects my mistakes because I will not repeat them again.*

For some of the participants, speaking English in the class and without preparation was stressful as stated by:

ST11BU　　*I feel self-conscious when I am not prepared to speak English in front of others.*

ST20KU　　*Mostly, I believe that I should not say anything wrong. When I say to myself that I should not say anything wrong, makes my speaking to be grammatically wrong, and makes me to make mistakes in subject-verb agreement such as use of he instead of she and vice versa.*

ST29KEU　*I have fright when others stop me at the time of speaking, because I don't have much confidence.*

ST13KU　　*Usually, I feel pressure and stress when I speak English in front of my teacher and classmates.*

4.2.2 Fear of Negative Evaluation

The participants indicated that they are afraid of being negatively evaluated in the class i.e., worry about making mistakes in English language class. For example,

ST7BU　　　*Yes, I feel a little worry about making mistakes, but it is natural and if I don't make mistake then I will not find the correct answer.*

ST8BU　　　*Yes, sometimes I worry about making mistakes in English class. When I use wrong grammar or local accent, I feel unhappy and it is no acceptable for me.*

ST18KU　　*I sometimes worry about making mistakes and sometimes no. I become more worried when I make*

mistakes from the previous lesson than new lesson.

ST29KEU   *I feel shy when I use wrong grammar and local accent.*

For some of the participants making mistakes in the English language class is not a serious problem as stated by:

ST10BU   *I am not worry about making mistakes in the English language class. As we know English is a second language. Maybe I have grammar, and pronunciation mistakes which occur during speaking English.*

ST25KEU   *No, I do not worry about making mistakes because English is not my native language.*

ST22KU   *Actually, I don't feel sad about making mistakes in English language class, I participate to English class to learn and improve my English and speak fluently.*

The participants compared their abilities with other students in the class and indicated that others are better in English. For instance,

ST25KEU   *Yes, others are better in English than me because I never participate in any other English course.*

ST26KU   *Talking about English ability, yes there might be some students who are better than me, but I believe on my ability as an English student.*

ST18KU   *Everyone has their own wellness and illness. I think some of them are better, and it is because of their hard works.*

Fear of being judged in English speaking by other students either positive or negative in an issue.

ST10BU   *I am afraid that other students will laugh at me when I speak English in the class.*

ST12BU   *Before I felt that others would laugh at me, but now I do not have this feeling. Let them laugh at me, but they are laughing on what I say. Even sometimes I also laugh on what I say because I say something which is not in entire English.*

ST13KU   *I am never afraid of students' laugh when speaking English. Making mistakes are the first reason to be motivated than any other kind of motivation. Sometimes, they may end in failure, but success is never possible without failure.*

4.2.3 Test Anxiety

Foreign language anxiety often occurs in testing situations. The participants stated that language testing is an issue for them.

ST10BU   *I feel stress during language tests.*

ST13KU   *I always feel nervous and surprised. The reason is that tests are beyond my expectations and could not be predicted that what will come in test as a question.*

ST29KEU   *In the English tests I feel relax, but I am worry about spelling mistakes.*

ST27KEU   *During English tests I feel comfortable, but I hate the fill-in the blanks types of question.*

The participants stated that they feel sad, and anxious when some students get so upset over English language classes.

ST26KEU   *Feel sad when people get upset in English language classes, it seems they don't like to speak in English.*

ST8BU   *When I see someone who get so upset over English language classes, it is unpleasant for me.*

ST16KU   *I worry about those students who get upset in English courses because the situation is not good for them.*

Generally, the participants like their English courses to compare with other courses as stated by:

ST26KEU   *Other classes are not interesting for me, but English conversation class is more interesting for me and feel happy.*

ST13KU   *My English class is well organized, and there are a lot of practical activities with a lot of homework.*

ST2BU   *I feel happy and excited in attending English language classes.*

Therefore, the findings of open-ended questionnaire show that most of the participants had foreign language speaking anxiety i.e., CA, FNE and TA.

5. Discussion

5.1 What Is the Level of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety among Afghanistan Undergraduate Students?

The findings from closed and open-ended questionnaire indicates that the participants experienced moderate level of foreign language speaking anxiety. Several studies reported a moderate level of FLSA among students in different countries and context such as Çağatay (2015) in Turkey, Toubot and Seng (2018) in Libya, Alnahidh and Altalhab (2020) in Saudi Arabia and   Tianjian (2010) in China. A moderate level of speaking anxiety can be accepted, but it requires to consider as alarming and needs to be dealt with. FLSA might negatively affect students' performance and demotivate them to express their thoughts in English.

The findings of the current study show that communication apprehension (CA) got the highest mean in comparison with the other two domains of FLA. The participants believed that communication apprehension was the most anxiety provoking, in the situation where they have to speak and communicate in English. The participants' point of view from the open-ended questionnaire indicates similar results. This findings is in line with Bhatti and Memon (2016) who found that CA as the most anxiety provoking area. This is may be because communicative tasks are challenging for most EFL students.

The results also revealed that the participants undergo fear of negative evaluation where they compare their abilities with others and worry about making mistakes in speaking English. The findings indicate that students experienced fear of negative evaluation in communication and interaction in English language classes. Previous studies found fear of negative evaluation as one of the main sources of language anxiety (Mukminin et al. 2015; Wardhani, 2019; Sadighi & Dastpak, 2017). Though, test anxiety got the lowest mean score, the participants still suffer from test anxiety. The participants stated that often tests are beyond their expectations, and they feel nervous during language tests and get upset over English language classes.

The study also investigated the relationship between the universities and components of foreign language speaking anxiety. The results of ANOVA show that there was not any statistically significant difference on the location of university and language anxiety. The university location does not impact on students' language anxiety. Regardless of the location of university either in urban or rural area, all the participants had similar foreign language speaking anxiety. However, the findings of the current study are not congruent with the findings of these two studies. For instance, Ezzi (2012) reported that students who reside in Hodeidah city has high level of foreign language anxiety than those who are living outside Hodeidah. Dissimilarly, Piechurska-Kuciel (2012) found that rural students significantly suffer from higher level of anxiety than their urban and suburban peers.

In the current study gender was considered as one of the important variables, as the findings indicate that female students have higher level of foreign language speaking anxiety than male students. In relation to this finding, previous studies found the same result (Karatas et al.,2016; Çağatay, 2015). However, Tianjian (2010) and Ran et al. (2022) found no significant difference on the level of speaking anxiety in terms of gender. The finding of Toghraee and Shahrokhi (2014) show that male and female participants did not have the same idea and perception on FLA, and it was found that female students have higher level of FLA than male students.

5.2 Is There Any Correlation between Components of Foreign Language Anxiety?

The findings for the second research question illustrate that there was a significant correlation between the components of foreign language anxiety i.e., CA, FNE and TA. A strong positive correlation found between CA and TA, and a strong positive relationship found between FNE and TA. This finding indicates that the components of foreign language anxiety are associated with each other. The findings of previous studies, however, are a little different. For instance, Luo (2013) reported that CA and FNE were not significantly correlated (r=.28 and .36, respectively) with FLA, whereas TA and foreign language anxiety had moderate and significant correlation (r= .53, p= .001). These findings illustrated that FLA as assessed by the FLCAS was recognizable from other kinds of anxieties and moreover should be regarded as an essential issue of language learning in and of itself.

6. Conclusion

The study aimed to investigate Afghanistan undergraduate English and literature students' perception on the level of English as a foreign language speaking anxiety (EFLSA) and its possible relationship between gender and university location. The results show that the participants had moderate level of FLA. The participants believed that CA is the most anxiety provoking factor following by FNE and TA, it is maybe because communication in English is difficult for most of EFL learners. The findings of the study also indicate that there was not statistically significant difference between the universities' location either urban or rural, and components of foreign language anxiety. Regardless of

the universities' location, all the students experienced speaking anxiety in the classroom. As gender was an important variable in this study, the results show that there was not significantly difference on the mean scores for male and female participants. However, female students experienced higher level of FLA than male students. In the context of Afghanistan, female students might feel shier to speak in English than male students.

Based on the findings, there was a significant correlation between the components of foreign language speaking anxiety i.e., CA, FNE and TA. It seems the components of FLA are interrelated to each other and should equally be considered in English language teaching and learning. Furthermore, the findings of open-ended questionnaire show that the participants experienced FLA. The participants believed that they feel frighten when they don't understand what their teachers say in English, get nervous when their errors are corrected by the teacher, and feel self-conscious when they are not prepared for speaking English in the classroom. The participants stated that they are being negatively evaluated by teachers or students. Most of them believed that they are worry about making mistakes. Some of them underestimated their ability by stating that others are better in English. Nevertheless, for some of the participants making mistakes are not a big deal, and they perceived as a type of motivation to improve. The participants indicated that they feel nervous and stress during language testing. For some of them the tests were difficult and beyond their expectations. The participants also believed that they feel sad when their classmates get nervous over English language classes. Regarding pedagogical implications, the findings of the current study propose to the MoHE, and universities to provide short, and long-term training for teachers to deal with FLA effectively. This will help them to be more sensitive in using teaching methods, learning materials, and speaking activities in the classroom. Further research is recommended i.e., using experimental research to find out students' actual speaking anxiety.

Conflict of Interest

The authors admit that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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