

Dynamic assessment of foreign language classroom anxiety among Pakistani undergraduates

Waqas Ahmad¹, Ubaid Ullah Ubaid², Souba Rethinasamy³

¹Department of English Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Sebelas Maret University, Surakarta, Indonesia

²Department of English, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Wah, Wah, Pakistan

³Faculty of Education, Language and Communication, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Sarawak, Malaysia

Article Info

Article history:

Received May 30, 2025

Revised May 20, 2026

Accepted Jun 30, 2026

Keywords:

Anxiety

Dynamic assessment

FLCA

Foreign language

Sociocultural theory

ABSTRACT

Proficiency in English in developing countries like Pakistan is considered a passport to a high-paying job and to belonging to the elite. However, despite learning English from primary school, Pakistani university students still lack confidence or feel hesitant when speaking English. Thus, the current study examined the dynamic assessment of foreign language classroom anxiety among Pakistani undergraduates. The data were collected from 30 undergraduates through semi-structured interviews. Following the Vygotskian sociocultural theory, the data were analyzed through thematic analysis. The results revealed that most of the students' anxiety is exacerbated by societal expectations, in-class presentations, peer pressure, lack of preparation, and speaking with someone of higher status. On the other hand, supportive and friendly teachers, class discussion, compliments from teachers, group discussion, and talking with teachers outside the classroom alleviate the learners' anxiety. These patterns highlight the worth of a mediated, feedback-rich classroom interaction which is in line with dynamic assessment (DA) principles. In terms of practice, the research points to the incorporation of DA-oriented mediation (scaffolding, guided prompts, and supportive feedback) in speaking tasks and teacher development as a way to alleviate the fear of negative evaluation and encourage participation in undergraduate English as a second language (ESL) classrooms.

This is an open access article under the [CC BY-SA](#) license.



Corresponding Author:

Waqas Ahmad

Department of English Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Sebelas Maret University
Jebres, Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia

Email: uoswaqas@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

English undoubtedly has a global appeal, and proficiency in English opens up a whole new world of opportunities. Yet learning a new language, particularly one as complex as English, does not come easily, especially in a non-native environment [1]. This process of learning can be long and complicated, which demands patience, resources, and mental fortitude [2]. Looking into the pervasive nature of foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) on the educational outcomes, researchers and educators have made efforts to find new methods to help learners overcome these obstacles [3]. A candidate approach is dynamic assessment (DA), which differs from traditional forms of assessment by embedding the process of teaching or intervention within an evaluation. DA is based upon Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which focuses on social interaction and mediated learning as paramount in cognitive growth [4].

Poehner [5] asserts that DA represents a synthesis of traditional tests and practices, bridging evaluation to instruction in a way that not only assesses what learners know but also assists what they can do. Foreign

language classroom anxiety is “a feeling of tension and apprehension in speaking context” [3]. It is multi-dimensional and consists of three interrelated dimensions: communication apprehension, or a fear of speaking and communicating in the target language; test anxiety, or a feeling of tension in situations of evaluation; and fear of negative evaluation, which is a fear of being judged by a teacher or peers [3]. DA, rooted in Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory (SCT), which suggests that learning is a mediated process shared among social entities in the zone of proximal development (ZPD), the area between a learner’s maximum independent performance and their maximum performance under guidance [6], [7]. By embedding action within assessment, DA scaffolds learners’ capacities through mediated talk-in-interaction and helps them to navigate difficulties that might otherwise increase anxiety [6].

The stakes are high where the English language is concerned for Pakistani undergraduates, due to persistent speaking fluency gaps driven by FLCA [8]. One of the problems that these students face is the constant struggle to speak English fluently, a problem that has been magnified due to the widespread experience of FLCA [8]. Early questions about the intersection of FLCA and DA in the context of Pakistani undergraduate education have not systematically emerged so far. This gap highlights a missed opportunity to apply DA methodologies to where traditional testing fails to address speaking anxiety. K ro lu [9] employed interventionist DA to evaluate speaking ability, the results of which confirmed that guided practice in the ZPD appeared to improve learners’ fluency while lowering the level of feeling that they were encountering a judge. Moreover, Zarei and Rezadoust [10] reported that scaffolding in feedback delivered in speaking tasks according to specialized principles of ZPD seems to reduce learners’ anxiety, as they receive immediate help and support for their linguistic deficits. The results of their study highlight the bivalent role of DA: the evaluation of current competencies and the cultivation of future potential, through socially mediated interventions.

This study contributes to DA’s improvement of functionality via mediated interaction, addressing the research gap on DA’s impact on FLCA among Pakistani undergraduates. This approach could inform understanding of DA and FLCA, but there are also practice and policy implications. Implications for teachers could include the development of alternative assessment and teaching approaches, being emotionally more sensitive to the language learners, and cognitively more sensitive to needs in the language learning environment [11]. From a policy standpoint, the findings highlight the need for implementing dynamic and supportive assessment approaches in education systems, which have largely been built around traditional assessments, especially in those contexts where such methods have not been sufficient.

Research questions: i) how do undergraduate English as a second language (ESL) learners experience FLCA across different classroom situations (e.g., being called on, presentations, group/pair work, and teacher-student interaction)? ii) what factors do Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners perceive as exacerbating and alleviating their FLCA in English learning? and iii) how do learners’ classroom interactions (with teachers and peers) shape the complexity and moment-to-moment fluctuations of foreign language classroom anxiety?

With the growing global demand for English proficiency, there is an urgent need to shift towards assessment methods that facilitate learning. With SCT’s argument that the presence of others and mediated learning recast anxiety-provoking tasks as co-participatory, low-stakes opportunities for development, DA offers (teaching and assessment) a hybrid solution for FLCA. Visual representation of the major dimensions of FLCA as shown in Figure 1.

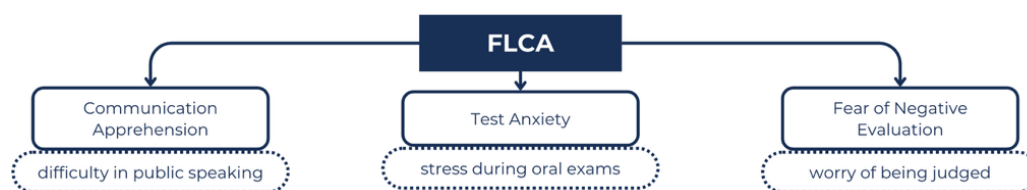


Figure 1. Visual representation of the major dimensions of FLCA: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation and how they shift in response to classroom tasks and social dynamics

2. METHOD

In the words of the relativist viewpoint, individuals of varying social class and ethnicity see the same reality in distinct ways as their understandings are shaped by the unique sociocultural contexts they inhabit [12]. The study carries a sociocultural stance to get a deeper understanding of how individuals interpret various situations and tasks related to learning a foreign language and anxiety. Furthermore, the comprehension of the level of anxiety and what a learner perceives about a situation is closely aligned with their social interaction and cultural context in cognitive development [3]. Thus, this research has adopted the qualitative approach to

explore the behavioral changes of individuals over time [13], [14]. This research aims to investigate the complexity of FLCA by employing DA to scaffold learner interactions within the ZPD framework of SCT. Through mediated dialogues, DA identifies learners' current competencies and potential growth, revealing how anxiety fluctuates as social interaction hinders or facilitates linguistic development [15].

Qualitative research is characterized by the careful selection of suitable methods and theories, the examination and analysis of various perspectives, the researchers' introspection on their research as a part of the knowledge generation process, and the utilization of diverse approaches and methods [16]. Given the crucial rise in the significance of qualitative research in recent years and its widespread acceptance as a research technique [16], this study focuses on the analysis of the contextual understanding of human behavior using interviews and focused group discussions to understand individual perceptions of anxiety and their levels. The reason behind opting for the qualitative method for this study is its natural setting, rich and deep data, and contextual understanding [13]. The method also allows the researcher to be closely engaged with the participants with the help of unstructured interviews, and to fully understand the standpoint of the participants [17]. Flowchart of methodology as shown in Figure 2.

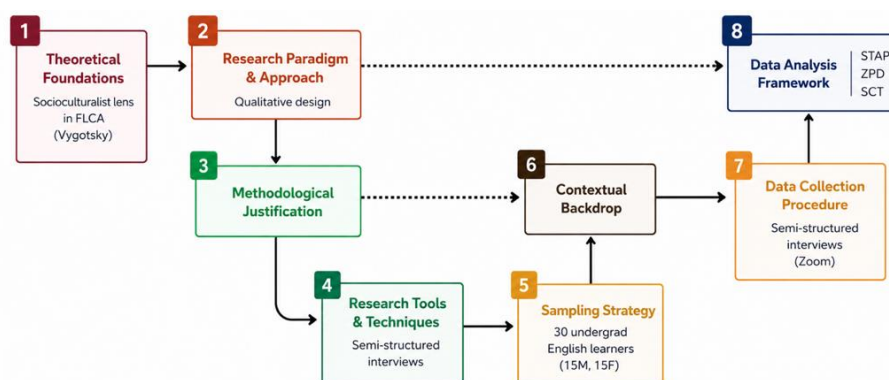


Figure 2. Flowchart of methodology

2.1. Participants

The participants of this study were the undergraduate students of different disciplines of study where English is taught as a compulsory subject at the University of Swabi, Pakistan. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the province where District Swabi is located, English is not widely used for everyday communication purposes [18]. Even an attempt to code-switch from Pashto to English in conversation by an educated individual is met with ridicule. That is the prevalent factor contributing to the limited use of the language in the region; even those with higher education do not primarily speak English in the social context [8]. More precisely, District Swabi is a socioeconomically disadvantaged region with few amenities. Although English is taught as a subject in elementary, secondary, and high schools in the area, the lack of infrastructure and limited access to digital platforms have resulted in no anticipated academic achievements [18].

2.2. Sampling

The researchers employed purposive sampling to guarantee the inclusion of participants from various departments of the university. This was done because English is not only taught as a mandatory subject in all departments, but also to undergraduate students in Pakistan who possess a thorough comprehension of the study goals and can provide detailed information on the intended objectives [19]. The researchers used precise inclusion criteria to choose these 30 people: they had to be a minimum of 18 years old, enrolled in undergraduate studies, active participants in English language classes, and eager to provide data. The sample size of 30 was selected because qualitative interview studies commonly use smaller, information-rich samples to enable depth of exploration and to support thematic saturation [20]. Data collection continued until the interview data became repetitive and no substantially new themes were emerging. This method enables the researcher to collect data from respondents who can provide a comprehensive interpretation. Consequently, the current study used purposive sampling for semi-structured interviews [21].

2.3. Data collection

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview questions were carefully designed following the literature on FLCA with particular focus on the theoretical framework

that is presented by Horwitz [3] and MacIntyre and Gardner [22]. In its original form, the guide had 11 original questions along with 15 probes and was organized around the three fundamental dimensions of FLCA, communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Examples were: “Describe a situation in the classroom when you were anxious during your English-speaking time”, “How do you feel when the teacher calls on you out of the blue to explain something?”, “What is the role of your peers or classmates in your anxiety?” The protocol covered all three dimensions of FLCA. The draft guide was checked by two professionals in applied linguistics to increase validity, and then pilot tested on three students to verify the correctness and suitability. Some slight alterations in wording were made. The ultimate version of the interview guide comprised open-ended questions that were centered on peer-teacher interaction, perceived language ability, and factors that provoked anxiety at a given moment (situational anxiety-eliciting factors). The use of interviews was a means to facilitate description, questioning, assessment, and analysis of personal narratives [17], [19]. The deliberate choice of a limited number of individuals allows the interviewer to effortlessly facilitate and regulate the data [19], [20].

Before data collection, the researchers ensured confidentiality by providing participants with a consent form and informing them that their names would be concealed, that their responses would be displayed using pseudonyms, that their data would be kept confidential and anonymous, and that they would not experience any physical, psychological, or emotional harm. The interviews were conducted using the Zoom video discussion technique with a total of 30 participants (15 male and 15 female). The interviews were planned to last 40 to 60 minutes, however, actual durations ranged from 13.14 to 43.48 minutes ($M=23.71$). As the participants were proficient enough in spoken English, the interviews were administered in English. The tapes were digitized, and the resultant transcripts contained 92,845 words.

2.4. Data analysis, thematic analysis (STAP)

The thematic analysis was conducted using STAP as outlined by Naeem *et al.* [23]. This procedure was used to identify and interpret themes in qualitative data, and to generate a conceptual-level description. Starting with transcription, data familiarization and quote selection took place. This coding process entailed unpacking of the data to determine initial themes and select participants’ sayings. Second, selection of keywords, the data were reviewed to search for recurring patterns, perspectives and the experiences of the participants. The third phase was coding, a series of short phrases or words, referred to as codes, was used to describe the data and to expose the core idea or message. Step four, theme development involved organizing the codes into groups that represent patterns and relationships. These themes could be interpreted as knowledge of the subject matter studied, which also constituted the concluded interpretations. Step five, conceptualization entailed translating keywords, codes and themes into categories to give a clear picture of the ideas. The final phase, step six, development of a conceptual model entailed developing an elaborate model of the data that explains the research questions. Finally, findings and insights from the data are also presented through the model as in Figure 3 [23], [24].

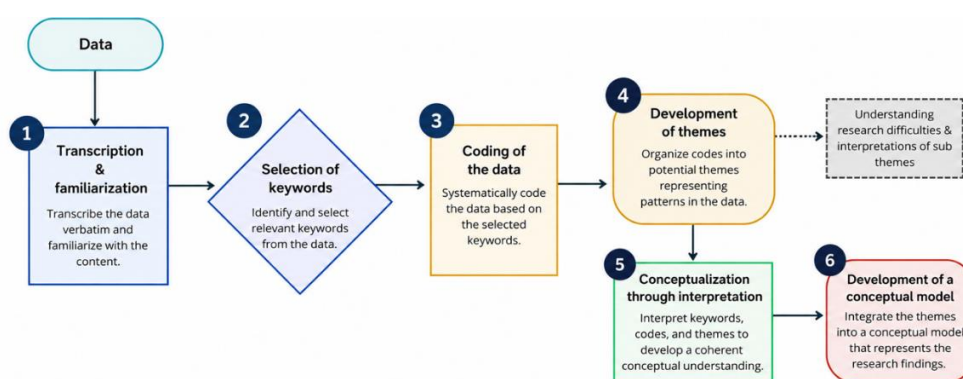


Figure 3. STAP

2.5. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was strengthened through the audit trail; consisting of raw transcripts, codebooks, reflexive journals, and analysis memos; ensured dependability by documenting decisions. Confirmability was supported through member checking, where participants validated the theme summaries with 90% agreement. The consent was detailed; no discrepancies were found [13], [16].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In today's age of global communication, which requires us to know multiple languages, (FLCA) serves as a major obstacle in successful language learning. The experience of learners in foreign language learning is often characterised by fear, which stems from various social and psychological causes. The study, which involves a thematic analysis of interviews conducted with 30 participants, reveals the complex nature of the interaction between societal views, social pressures, and the power of teachers when it comes to the stress experienced by learners of foreign languages, as summarized in Table 1. Drawing on Vygotsky's SCT, the study explored how these intersecting aspects impact learners' confidence and preparedness for engaging in the learning of a foreign language. Thematic map linking exacerbating and alleviating factors of FLCA with DA/SCT mechanisms are shown in Figure 4. Major themes exacerbating FLCA are shown in Table 1. Main themes alleviating/reducing FLCA in the interviews are shown in Table 2.

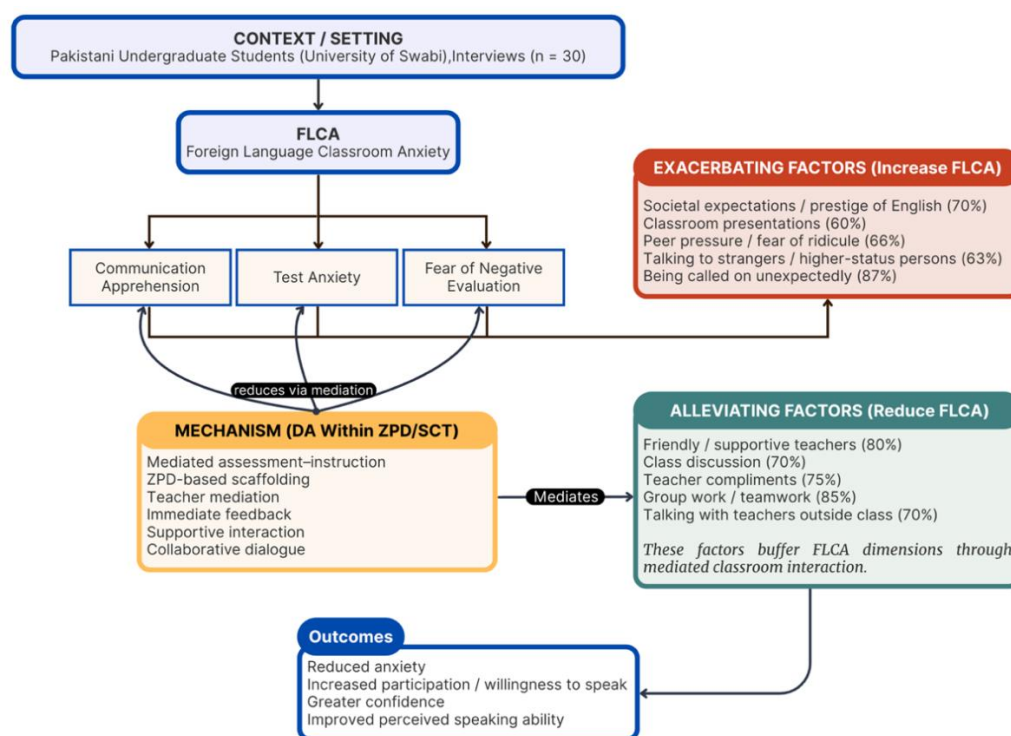


Figure 4. Thematic map linking exacerbating and alleviating factors of FLCA with DA/SCT mechanisms

Table 1. Major themes exacerbating FLCA

Theme	Frequency	%
Presentation in the classroom	18	60
Blocking chances for participation in class due to peer pressure exists	20	66
Talking with strangers or a person of high status	19	63
Get anxious when called upon unexpectedly	26	87

Table 2. Main themes alleviating/reducing FLCA in the interviews

Theme	Frequency	%
Friendly and supportive teachers	24	80
Participating in class discussion	21	70
Working in a group or team inside the classroom	25	85
Talking with teachers outside the classroom	21	70

3.1. Major themes exacerbating to FLCA

3.1.1. Presentation in the classroom

Anxieties regarding classroom presentations were reported as a noteworthy topic, with more than 60% of the respondents reporting that they extremely dislike presenting in front of their classmates. Pupils may be

more self-conscious about self-presentation (content and language judgements) in 'English as the language of dominance' environments. One participant remarked, "*The moment I stand up to speak, I know that everyone is focused on my English, not my input.*" The vivid concept of 'eyes' on them mirrors that the students are vulnerable when they publicly speak a foreign language. The discomfort of presentations is often more than garden-variety fear of speaking in public; it runs deep as being exposed as inadequate before peers. Another student asserted, "*When I make a presentation, it sounds like I make mistakes twice because it's in English.*" Another student revealed, "*I really study it, but whenever I get to the part where I'm saying it, it's like my mind goes blank.*"

3.1.2. Peer pressure and participation anxiety

A major theme found in the research is peer pressure; 66% of respondents agree that it affects them against fully participating in class. In the language classroom, social fear is found to be reinforced by social interactions, creating a subtle but powerful obstacle to engagement. "*I keep my thoughts to myself for fear of being laughed at by my friends,*" openly stated one of the students. This is the internalized fear that blocks their calling. Moreover, the fear of peers judging blocks the social aspect of learning a language. "*There are a lot of times I feel like I want to say something, but I am always worried that I would sound stupid in my accent or in the middle of wrong grammar.*" This fear of perceived 'flaws' in language use demonstrates a greater concern for peer feedback. "*Why should I risk talking and get insulted?*" said another student. The use of the term 'risk' here is instructive in that, for some students, to engage in class discussions, they see this as a risky business, rather than a learning opportunity.

3.1.3. Talking with a strange person or a person of high status

About 63% of participants said they were more scared of authority figures, especially their teachers. Kids growing up with an authoritarian culture is why this happens. They always think of teachers as reigning over them, and the power imbalance makes them more aware of themselves and scared. "*I don't even talk to my teacher, but if I do, I feel like I'm being judged with every word I say.*" This metaphor of being 'under the microscope' effectively depicts the fear that comes from feeling under scrutiny with language use, multiplying the self-doubt in a challenging situation. Interactions with teachers are also not seen as merely information exchanges but evaluations of the worth of students, which are particularly threatening. "*We should be perfect when we communicate with our teacher,*" said another participant. The idea of 'perfection' highlights the immense pressure and the fear of making mistakes that it creates can hinder true enjoyment.

3.1.4. Get anxious when called upon unexpectedly

The theme of anxiety due to sudden calling is closely related, where 26 out of 30 respondents mentioned that they experienced high anxiety from this type of encounter. There are a lot of reasons for this, and fear of being judged and feeling unready are just a few of them. "*When the teacher looks at me and calls my name, I freeze,*" one student revealed. This form of 'freezing' is a mental block that happens when students suddenly find themselves on the spot without warning. "*It was almost like being put on stage, and you don't know the words,*" another student said. This portrays the heightened self-consciousness when learners are called on without prior notice. "*I have this fear that if I pause, someone will think that I don't know anything,*" highlighting the personalized stress to answer quickly and without error.

3.2. Main themes alleviating FLCA in the interviews

3.2.1. The role of friendly and supportive teachers

A relatively positive aspect recognized was the positive role of friendly and supportive teachers; 80% of learners reported that such teachers significantly reduced their anxiety. "*When my teacher is inclusive, I feel seen rather than misunderstood.*" This is expressive of the alchemical power of empathy, where a more cheerful disposition on the part of teachers changes a classroom from a site of confrontation into a place of cooperation. Students often mentioned the impact of educators, some of whom demonstrated patience and compassion. "*Getting a smile from my teacher makes me less worried about making mistakes,*" said another, illustrating that small acts of kindness can ease students' fear. As one student noted, "*If my teacher makes more positive comments about my performance, I feel more confident about what I do,*" highlighting how positive comments could increase the motivation for the effort. This support creates an environment where students are comfortable playing with language, without the constant fear of failure.

3.2.2. Participating in class discussion

Participation in class discussions turned out to play an important role in reducing anxiousness for 70% of the participants, many of whom reported that only in these discussions did they manage to speak in a less formal setting and to practice the English language. One student noted, "*In a discussion, it feels like everyone*

is learning at the same time, instead of just testing me." This view of communal learning liberates us from the pressures of individual success and shifts the focus from testing to shared growth. Class discussions allow students to build confidence through participation. *"When I'm participating in a discussion, I can really trust my own voice,"* shared one participant, revealing the development of self-confidence that is built through participation. Another student added, *"During discussions, the focus isn't so much about 'perfect' English but to speak and speak."* This could be seen as a rare opportunity to use language in a more authentic, less judgmental setting.

3.2.3. Cooperative learning and teamwork

Group activities are also an effective way to decrease the anxiety of language learning through sharing responsibilities and cooperative learning, as revealed by 85% of the students. *"In a group, I have less of a feeling of privacy here, because we are all together on this,"* (the informant meaning the satisfaction attached to shared learning activities). If students are reluctant, small group activities allow them the opportunity to interact with one another and practice in an environment where the stakes feel low. Another participant stated *"In a group, I know that if I am having trouble, others can help me."* The result is a sense of togetherness, language learning seems a collective pursuit, rather than an isolated one. One participant explained, *"I learn better before I hear from my team members because I feel less overwhelmed."*

3.2.4. Engaging with tutors beyond the classroom

Engagements with teachers beyond the classroom, which were described by 70% of the learners, emerged as a key theme in reducing anxiety. Many students commented on how unstructured conversations with their teachers allowed them to be recognized as people rather than as students. As one participant observed, *"Speaking with my teacher outside of class is more like a conversation rather than ... being quizzed,"* indicating that informal encounters like this help alleviate anxiety associated with formal learning contexts. *"Talking to my teacher after class helps me see that they do care about my education,"* explained a third student, highlighting the emotional care involved in the extra class interactions. Through relationships outside the classroom, students' fears can be alleviated through a sense of belonging and acceptance, not confined to formal academic settings.

3.3. Discussion

As an exploratory study, this paper provides insights into the variety of factors, including personal factors, that condition FLCA; some are beneficial, while others hinder the language learning process. Results show that FLCA emerges from an interplay of social, psychological, and contextual factors, supporting and extending previous literature.

Social factors, peer pressure, and unexpected interventions of teachers are reported as the main factors of FLCA. A staggering 70% of respondents reported that the societal views, such as what it means to learn a language well, increased their anxiety quite a bit. Similarly, 66% of learners experienced peer-induced anxiety, which they felt specifically inhibited their ability to participate in class. Such findings demonstrate the social constructivist nature of FLCA as per Vygotsky's SCT for learning as an experience embedded within social interaction [15], [25]. In contrast, positive behaviors of teachers and shared classroom practices showed effectiveness in reducing anxiety. For example, 80% of participants reported that friendly and encouraging teachers had a positive impact on their confidence. Moreover, group work (85%) as well as teacher feedback (75%) made for a more comfortable, and thus a productive learning environment. These results echo previous literature, notably studies by Woodrow [26] and Zarei and Rezadoust [10], both of which highlight the importance of ZPD, scaffolding, and constructive feedback to reduce anxiety.

This study extends previous work by providing a more nuanced understanding of FLCA. Several previous studies [27] and [28] concentrated on second/foreign language anxiety alleviation through DA principles. The thematic analysis demonstrates resounding parallels, such as the value of differentiated feedback and collaborative learning strategies. Furthermore, results describing societal and peer effects build upon Woodrow's [26] observation that contact with native speakers serves as a key source of anxiety, demonstrating wider sociocultural framing. Interestingly, anxiety is high (87%) when talking to strangers with a higher status. This finding contrasts with those of previous research [29]–[31] focusing mainly on the linguistic performance deficit model; anxiety resulted from inadequate linguistic knowledge and fear of social judgment in speaking (especially in terms of the school context). This contrast indicates the relevance of a more specific investigation into how hierarchy operates in classes and in social settings.

The predictably observed results have critical pedagogical implications. Educators must provide healthy and engaging classroom experiences where students can minimize their FLCA. Group work, open lines of communication, and repeating positive reinforcement can build students' confidence and willingness to engage. This willingness to engage aligns closely with willingness to communicate, shown to rise with motivation among Pakistani undergraduates [32]. Moreover, the use of DA frameworks as strategies could lead

to better learning results along with lower anxiety techniques [33]. Teachers should also understand the social and status aspects of language anxiety, including why perceived differences in status and fear of unfamiliarity can exacerbate students' unease. Instructional design Teacher training programs would benefit from incorporating modules on affective factors, including ways to reduce status imbalances and foster inclusive peer interaction. Finally, by constructing classroom environments in which mistakes are repositioned as learning opportunities rather than failures, we might be able to retrain students' anxiety response systems and encourage a more resilient, growth-mindset orientation.

Moreover, although the current research focuses on the experiences of learners, perceptions of the teachers regarding FLCA should also be incorporated in the research studies in the future. Educators are at the forefront of creating the climate in the classroom, and their sensitivity to the anxiety of students can considerably affect the instructional design, feedback, and patterns of interaction. Horwitz [3] points out that language anxiety is pivotal to effective pedagogy, and Farhady and Tavassoli [34] point out that teacher perception is the key to assessment practices that could either alleviate or increase anxiety. Dewaele and MacIntyre [35] also indicate that the teacher variables have a profound influence on the enjoyment and anxiety, but Woodrow [26] demonstrates the importance of the pattern of interaction in the classroom to the formation of speaking anxiety. In the same manner, Liu and Hong [36] demonstrate how the behaviors of teachers can promote or reduce classroom anxiety, and Zarei and Rahmaty [33] validate that speaking-related stress can be reduced with scaffolded feedback. The addition of teacher views in the form of interviews would thus represent a complementary and holistic view of the dynamic of classroom anxiety.

3.3.1. Policy implications (Pakistan)

From a policy perspective, the evidence calls for the enhancement of formative, supportive assessment practices in Pakistani higher education with the help of DA, oriented mediation (scaffolding, guided prompts, and feedback) in speaking courses and assessment routines. Teacher professional development modules on mediation strategies, low-stakes speaking tasks, and feedback that alleviates the fear of negative evaluation while encouraging participation can be one way of operationalizing this. Such a match would allow universities to go beyond product-oriented testing only and thus respond better to students' anxiety, related barriers in English learning. Embedding these mediation practices within an informal digital learning of English (IDLE)-informed policy framework could further align classroom change with national language policy [32].

3.3.2. Comparative perspective

Research in other Asian contexts similarly points to anxiety dynamics around speaking and the importance of supportive, feedback-rich classroom practices to mitigate this anxiety. For example, studies in Indonesia find that dynamic assessment can help open up a more comfortable feedback environment that students associate with less anxiety when developing their speaking [28], [29], [37]. Research in Turkey also indicates that interventionist DA can foster a more relaxed assessment environment and thus reduce speaking anxiety [9]. Foreign language learning anxieties in Iran have been studied as well, with researchers there also emphasizing the role of classroom climate, evaluation pressure, and supportive interaction in the experience of anxiety. This suggests that DA-oriented mediation may also be applicable in similar high-stakes English-learning contexts.

3.3.3. Future directions

Future research needs to directly test DA in the classroom, based on interventions. Recent AI-mediated IDLE practice offers one promising intervention model, already shown to reduce speaking anxiety in Pakistani ESL contexts [38]. Such a test could include implementing mediated prompts and feedback cycles in speaking tasks. The researchers should also track changes in FLCA over time. Longitudinal designs spanning a semester (or multiple semesters) could elucidate whether the reduction in anxiety is maintained beyond the brief classroom interaction. The use of mixed-method designs that combine interviews with repeated-measure anxiety instruments would further provide evidence of the extent of the effect and its durability.

3.4. Limitations and recommendations

This study has several shortcomings. Most critically, the qualitative nature and small sample size ($n=30$) limits generalizability to Swabi, Pakistan. The exclusive reliance on self-reported information introduces subjective bias, which might have been mitigated by quantitative triangulation. Moreover, the focus on English undergraduate students restricts the applicability of findings to other linguistic or occupational settings. Although DA offers a rich context to investigate mediated learning and FLCA, its application in this instance is constrained by researchers' interpretive frameworks, which may not accurately reflect the multifaceted and dynamic processes of cognition and affect involved. Such constraints require cautious interpretation and further empirical research. The other limitation is that the study solely used the views of the

students without the voices of teachers being included. Since teachers frequently become mediators of the interaction and anxiety-reduction measures in the classroom, their visions would be a valuable contribution to the observation of how FLCA is acknowledged, perceived, and addressed through the lenses of the instructional aspect. Further research ought to thus integrate student and teacher data, maybe through mixed-method research including parallel interviews, focus groups or surveys, to triangulate and deepen the insights.

Future research could employ larger, more heterogeneous samples from more than one institution and sociocultural setting to allow for more generalizability. Mixed-method designs incorporating quantitative measures would be able to reduce bias and increase data validity and generalizability. Longitudinal designs would enable us to study the long-term impact of FLCA. In addition, the inclusion of dynamic assessment models to a greater extent will allow for a better understanding of mediated learning processes. Expansion of research from English to other languages and into professional domains will provide a clearer picture of the multifaceted nature of FLCA.

4. CONCLUSION

The study suggests that sociocultural settings, such as supportive and friendly teachers, class discussion, teacher compliments, group discussion, and talking with teachers outside the classroom, alleviate the learners' anxiety. This indicates that sociocultural tenets, mediation, ZPD, and scaffolding could be incorporated in the teaching and learning to enhance the learners' communication skills. On the other hand, debilitating factors such as societal expectations, during presentations in the class, peer pressure, when called upon unexpectedly, and talking with a person of high status should be considered by the stakeholders and universities to enable learners to showcase their abilities in the corporate sector. Moreover, students should be provided with opportunities to express their ideas in the form of presentations and discussions to alleviate their feelings of anxiety.

FUNDING INFORMATION

This study was supported by funding from University Malaysia Sarawak.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

This journal uses the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) to recognize individual author contributions, reduce authorship disputes, and facilitate collaboration

Name of Author	C	M	So	Va	Fo	I	R	D	O	E	Vi	Su	P	Fu
Waqas Ahmad	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Ubaid Ullah Ubaid	✓	✓		✓						✓		✓	✓	
Souba Rethinasamy	✓			✓						✓		✓	✓	✓

C : **C**onceptualization

M : **M**ethodology

So : **S**oftware

Va : **V**alidation

Fo : **F**ormal analysis

I : **I**nvestigation

R : **R**esources

D : **D**ata Curation

O : **O**riting - **O**riginal Draft

E : **E**riting - **R**eview & **E**editing

Vi : **V**isualization

Su : **S**upervision

P : **P**roject administration

Fu : **F**unding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

INFORMED CONSENT

We have obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The research related to human use has complied with all relevant national regulations and institutional policies in accordance with the tenets of the Helsinki Declaration and has been approved by the University of Swabi, Pakistan.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, [WA], upon reasonable request.

REFERENCES

- [1] M. Younas, D. El-Dakhs, B. Anwar, and Y. Jinag, "Motivational role of teachers in developing English speaking skills of Pakistani university students," *Frontiers in Education*, vol. 10, Sep. 2025, doi: 10.3389/feduc.2025.1626602.
- [2] F. Liaqat, M. Islam, M. U. Azim, and A. S. Lodhi, "Investigating academic resilience in learning English: an ecological context of undergraduate students," *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 15, Jan. 2025, doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1467544.
- [3] E. Horwitz, "Language anxiety and achievement," *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, vol. 21, pp. 112–126, Jan. 2001, doi: 10.1017/s0267190501000071.
- [4] E. Rassaei, "Implementing mobile-mediated dynamic assessment for teaching request forms to EFL learners," *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, vol. 36, no. 3, pp. 257–287, 2021, doi: 10.1080/09588221.2021.1912105.
- [5] M. E. Poehner, "Beyond the test: L2 dynamic assessment and the transcendence of mediated learning," *The Modern Language Journal*, vol. 91, no. 3, pp. 323–340, 2007, doi: 10.1111/j.1540-4781.2007.00583.x.
- [6] C. S. Lidz and B. Gindis, "Dynamic assessment of the evolving cognitive functions in children," in *Vygotsky's Educational Theory in Cultural Context*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 99–116. doi: 10.1017/cbo9780511840975.007.
- [7] T. F. Moghaddam and I. Montashery, "Dynamic Assessment of Iranian EFL Learners' Past Tense Development in the Context of Writing Practice: A Socio-constructive Perspective," *International Journal of Research in English Education*, vol. 9, no. 3, pp. 1–15, Jul. 2024.
- [8] M. Younas, B. Pervaiz, and S. Maqbool, "Investigating the challenges faced by Pakistani EFL teachers: a literature review," *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review*, vol. 6, no. II, 2022, doi: 10.47205/plhr.2022(6-ii)74.
- [9] Z. Ç. Köroğlu, "Interventionist dynamic assessment's effects on speaking skills testing: case of ELT teacher candidates," *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, vol. 10, no. 3, p. 23, 2019, doi: 10.7575/aiac.all.s.v.10n.3p.23.
- [10] A. A. Zarei and H. Rezaei, "The effects of scaffolded and unscaffolded feedback on speaking anxiety and self-efficacy," *Journal of Modern Research in English Language Studies*, vol. 7, no. 4, pp. 111–132, 2020.
- [11] E. Mehri and M. Amerian, "Challenges to dynamic assessment in second language learning," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, vol. 5, no. 7, p. 1458, 2015, doi: 10.17507/tpls.0507.19.
- [12] P. Boghossian, "Behaviorism, constructivism, and socratic pedagogy," *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, vol. 38, no. 6, pp. 713–722, Jan. 2006, doi: 10.1111/j.1469-5812.2006.00226.x.
- [13] J. Oranga and A. Matere, "Qualitative research: essence, types and advantages," *OALib*, vol. 10, no. 12, pp. 1–9, 2023, doi: 10.4236/oalib.1111001.
- [14] O. Isik, "Qualitative research approaches and data collection methods: understanding meaning and experience," *Journal of Humanities and Education Development*, vol. 7, no. 6, pp. 19–32, 2025, doi: 10.22161/jhed.7.6.3.
- [15] N.-V. Sarmiento-Campos et al., "A look at Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT): the effectiveness of scaffolding method on EFL learners' speaking achievement," *Education Research International*, vol. 2022, pp. 1–12, Dec. 2022, doi: 10.1155/2022/3514892.
- [16] B. P. Regmi, "Qualitative research design: a discussion on its types," *Research Journal*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 37–45, Dec. 2024, doi: 10.3126/rj.v9i1.74415.
- [17] Ruslin, S. Mashuri, M. S. A. Rasak, F. Alhabsyi, and H. Syam, "Semi-structured Interview: a methodological reflection on the development of a qualitative research instrument in educational studies," *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education (IOSR-JRME)*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 22–29, 2022.
- [18] S. Gul, F. Shah, and Kifayatullah, "Pedagogy of the oppressed: Paulo Freire's pedagogic critique of poetry-1 syllabus at maters level (English) At University of Swabi, Pakistan," *Pakistan Journal of Social Research*, vol. 04, no. 01, pp. 629–636, Mar. 2022, doi: 10.52567/pjsr.v4i1.929.
- [19] K. Howell, *An introduction to the philosophy of methodology*. 1 Oliver's Yard, 55 City Road, London EC1Y 1SP United Kingdom: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2013, doi: 10.4135/9781473957633.
- [20] K. Gandy, "How many interviews or focus groups are enough?" *Evaluation Journal of Australasia*, vol. 24, no. 3, pp. 211–223, 2024, doi: 10.1177/1035719x241266964.
- [21] M. Ahmad and S. Wilkins, "Purposive sampling in qualitative research: a framework for the entire journey," *Quality & Quantity*, vol. 59, no. 2, pp. 1461–1479, Dec. 2024, doi: 10.1007/s11135-024-02022-5.
- [22] P. D. MacIntyre and R. C. Gardner, "The subtle effects of language anxiety on cognitive processing in the second language," *Language Learning*, vol. 44, no. 2, pp. 283–305, 1994, doi: 10.1111/j.1467-1770.1994.tb01103.x.
- [23] M. Naeem, W. Ozuem, K. Howell, and S. Ranfagni, "A step-by-step process of thematic analysis to develop a conceptual model in qualitative research," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, vol. 22, Oct. 2023, doi: 10.1177/16094069231205789.
- [24] L. Lingard, "Beyond the default colon: effective use of quotes in qualitative research," *Perspectives on Medical Education*, vol. 8, no. 6, pp. 360–364, Nov. 2019, doi: 10.1007/s40037-019-00550-7.
- [25] I. B. Weiner, W. M. Reynolds, and G. E. Miller, *Handbook of psychology*. 2nd ed, New Jersey, Canada: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2012.
- [26] L. Woodrow, "Anxiety and speaking English as a second language," *RELC Journal*, vol. 37, no. 3, pp. 308–328, Dec. 2006, doi: 10.1177/0033688206071315.
- [27] M. Safdari and J. Fathi, "Investigating the role of dynamic assessment on speaking accuracy and fluency of pre-intermediate EFL learners," *Cogent Education*, vol. 7, no. 1, Jan. 2020, doi: 10.1080/2331186x.2020.1818924.
- [28] M. Estaji and M. Farahanynia, "The immediate and delayed effect of dynamic assessment approaches on EFL learners' oral narrative performance and anxiety," *Educational Assessment*, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 135–154, Feb. 2019, doi: 10.1080/10627197.2019.1578169.
- [29] J. Naeini, "A comparative study of the effects of two approaches of dynamic assessment on the reading comprehension of Iranian EFL learners," *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, vol. 4, no. 2, Nov. 2014, doi: 10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.4n.2p.54.
- [30] M. A. Safa and S. Beheshti, "Interactionist and interventionist group dynamic assessment (GDA) and EFL learners' listening comprehension development," *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 37–56, 2018.
- [31] M. A. A.-D. Abdulaal, M. H. Alenazi, A. J. A. Tajuddin, and B. Hamidi, "Dynamic vs. diagnostic assessment: impacts on EFL learners' speaking fluency and accuracy, learning anxiety, and cognitive load," *Language Testing in Asia*, vol. 12, no. 1, Aug. 2022, doi: 10.1186/s40468-022-00179-0.

- [32] U. U. Ubaid, W. Ahmad, and K. Khalid, "Willingness to communicate in english in relation to motivation among Pakistani undergraduates," *Journal of Applied Linguistics and TESOL (JALT)*, vol. 8, no. 3, pp. 1265–1281, Aug. 2025, doi: 10.63878/jalt1106.
- [33] A. A. Zarei and H. Rahmaty, "The effects of interactionist and interventionist dynamic assessment on EFL students' perfectionism, willingness to communicate, and foreign language anxiety," *International Journal of Language Testing (IJLT)*, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 13–33, 2021.
- [34] H. Farhady and K. Tavassoli, "EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of their language assessment knowledge," *Language Testing in Asia*, vol. 11, no. 1, Oct. 2021, doi: 10.1186/s40468-021-00135-4.
- [35] J.-M. Dewaele and P. D. MacIntyre, "The predictive power of multicultural personality traits, learner and teacher variables on foreign language enjoyment and anxiety," in *Evidence-Based Second Language Pedagogy*, Routledge, 2019, pp. 263–286, doi: 10.4324/9781351190558-12.
- [36] M. Liu and M. Hong, "English language classroom anxiety and enjoyment in Chinese young learners," *Sage Open*, vol. 11, no. 4, Oct. 2021, doi: 10.1177/21582440211047550.
- [37] E. Namaziandost, H. K. Behbahani, and A. Naserpour, "Peer support in language learning: mitigating anxiety, enhancing achievement, cultivating growth mindsets, and increasing enjoyment," *Journal of Applied Learning and Teaching*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 296–313, Sep. 2024, doi: 10.37074/jalt.2024.7.2.40.
- [38] W. Ahmad, J. Nurkamto, and N. A. Dradjati, "AI-IDLE-enabled practice as a transfer mechanism for speaking anxiety reduction in Pakistani ESL contexts," *Voices of English Language Education Society*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 118–130, May 2026, doi: 10.29408/veles.v10i1.33608.

BIOGRAPHIES OF AUTHORS



Waqas Ahmad    is a Research Assistant at Sebelas Maret University, Indonesia. He holds a master's in English language education, a bachelor's in English studies (Gold Medal), and a bachelor's in education. He founded Talent Quest platform to foster educational innovation. His research focuses on EdTech, foreign language anxiety, Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE), dynamic assessment, AI in education, and multimodal learning, with expertise in data-driven education and conference speaking. He can be contacted at email: uoswaqas@gmail.com.



Ubaid Ullah Ubaid    holds an M.Phil. in Applied Linguistics from the University of Lahore, Pakistan, and a Ph.D. from the University of Malaysia Sarawak. He currently serves as an Assistant Professor at University of Wah Pakistan. His research, published in various peer-reviewed journals, explores themes such as Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in English, digital tools in language learning, learner motivation, language anxiety, modern teaching methodologies, and the integration of artificial intelligence and technology in English language education. He can be contacted at email: ubaidwahid@gmail.com or ubaid.ullah@uow.edu.pk.



Souba Rethinasamy    is a professor at the Faculty of Education, Language, and Communication at Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. She earned her Ph.D. in Language Testing and Evaluation from the University of Roehampton, London. With over 30 years of experience in teaching English and related courses at the tertiary level, her academic interests include English language teaching and learning, English medium instruction, testing and evaluation, and student mobility. She can be contacted at email: rsouba@unimas.my.