

# Language Anxiety Variables and Their Negative Effects on SLA: A Psychosocial Reality in Bangladesh

Souvik Barua

*Department of English, Chittagong Independent University, Bangladesh*

**Abstract:** The study aimed to explore the psychological and socio-cultural factors that contribute to situation-specific anxiety and impede second language acquisition (SLA). It collected data from a survey questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions with 39 Bangladeshi EFL learners at the tertiary level. The findings indicate that situation-specific anxiety has a negative impact on the acquisition of a second language. This language anxiety stems from distinct personality traits, including fear of public speaking, fear of making mistakes, fear of being negatively judged by teachers and peers, lack of self-confidence, peer comparison, fear of native cultural exclusion, and an overall unfavorable classroom environment. The results imply several psychosocial and individual perspectives which cannot be ignored in the essential concept of second language acquisition. Teachers may use this study as a reference to assist their students in generating better ideas and understanding second language acquisition from the perspective of the learners.

**Keywords:** psycho-social variables of anxiety, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, English as a foreign or second language, foreign language learning, Bangladeshi EFL learners

## I. LANGUAGE ANXIETY VARIABLES AND THEIR NEGATIVE EFFECTS ON SLA: A PSYCHOSOCIAL REALITY IN BANGLADESH

Anxiety is a physical and psychological reaction to a perceived threat or situation. It has both cognitive and controlling components and influences your capacity for thought and information processing. The definition of anxiety, according to Casado and Dereshiwsky (2001), ranges from scientifically observable behaviors to difficult-to-define emotions. It is among the most significant and unavoidable factors that can slow down the SLA procedure. It is, in a broad sense, the subjective experience of tension, fear, nervousness, and worry that results from autonomic nervous system activation (Spielberger, 1983). It stems from the fear of losing one's self-identity and pursues the goals, careers, and lifestyle of an individual. Language anxiety is presumed to be common at the micro level in Bangladesh as a result of functional communication and practices in classrooms, minimal access to the foreign or second language beyond the classrooms, the communicators' use of their mother tongue, and a wide range of other psychological and socio-cultural factors.

The majority of previous discourses on negative emotions in educational settings has centered on anxiety (Daubney,

Dewaele, & Gkonou, 2017). The peculiar nature of anxiety in language learning presents both language learners and instructors with an additional challenge. It makes learning more difficult psychologically. A substantial number of second-language learners believe anxiety impedes the cognitive process of language acquisition, and it is one of the most researched psychological variables (Horwitz, 1986). Despite the fact that anxiety can fluctuate during the course of a class, it is typically related to what foreign language learners have experienced over an extended period of study vis-à-vis arrangements such as test scores, privileged attitudes toward the target language, and standing relative to their classmates (Horwitz, 2017). It's been connected to the stringent error correction used by teachers (Gregersen, 2003) and eventually results in teacher-learner incompatibility (Gregersen, MacIntyre, & Meza, 2014). It has been demonstrated that it hinders foreign language acquisition and performance (Horwitz, 2017; MacIntyre, 2017).

Foreign or second language learning can be traumatic for some learners. At least fifty percent of the learners surveyed by Worde (1998) reported that their fear of language caused them psycho-somatic problems. This research has investigated an overwhelming number of anxiety-related factors. The theoretical continuum of this study ranged from purely behavioral to psychological. Three distinct but related perspectives are used to synthesize the study: a cognitive perspective, a curriculum perspective, and a socio-cultural perspective. This study aims to examine the relationship between anxiety and the acquisition of a foreign or second language in a broader context. It is essential to comprehend frequent psychological emotions. This may be the most effective way to provide anxious second-language learners with the necessary support and assistance.

### *Research Questions*

1. What are the potential psychological and linguistic barriers that result in English language anxiety among Bangladeshi tertiary-level learners?
2. How do the potential socio-cultural impediments cause anxiety and fear among Bangladeshi EFL tertiary learners?

### *Purpose of the Present Study*

Evidently, Bangladesh lacks qualitative research on language anxiety. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the psychological, academic, and socio-cultural variables that contribute to situation-specific language anxiety among EFL university learners in Bangladesh. This study may play a supportive role and contribute to improved communication skills by identifying and implementing the necessary steps to overcome the negative effects of situation-specific anxiety associated with the acquisition of English as a foreign or second language.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature provides numerous definitions of foreign language anxiety. Horwitz et al. (1986) and MacIntyre (1999) have contributed significantly to our understanding of language anxiety by proposing two significant definitions (Ortega, 2009). Horwitz et al. (1986) define language anxiety as a unique, multifaceted set of personality traits, attitudes, and emotions that result from the distinctive characteristics of the process of language learning. Accordingly, MacIntyre (1999) defines language anxiety as a feeling of stress, anxiety, emotional response, and worry associated with the acquisition of a foreign or second language.

To gain a thorough understanding of foreign language anxiety, it is necessary to examine the general characteristics of anxiety. Anxiety is divided into three psychological categories: trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situational anxiety (Spielberger, 1983). When a person tends to be anxious permanently, they exhibit the trait of anxiety (Scovel, 1978). It is a character trait that is unaffected by circumstances. This distinctive feature of anxiety does not change frequently because it is innate to the individual. It may interfere with cognitive performance and memory (Eysenck, 1979). State anxiety is characterized as an affective state. It is one's psychological response when they consider a certain circumstance intimidating, regardless of whether there is a concealed problem or not (Spielberger, 1972). It is also defined as a fluctuating feeling of unease that varies in duration and intensity and may change with time (Young, 1998). It influences a person's emotions, thoughts, and behavior.

Situation-specific anxiety arises at a certain time in response to a particular situation (Spielberger, 1983). It is closely associated with particular conditions in which one condition varies from another but remains stable over time. The chief example of situation-specific anxiety is language anxiety. Linguists believe the acquisition of a second language is associated with situation-specific anxiety and not trait anxiety because trait anxiety is stable and causes anxiety in all situations, whereas situation-specific anxiety is related to particular situations. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) argued a situation-specific perspective is the most effective research strategy for speaking anxiety due to the fact that learners undergo anxiety in a wide range of educational contexts.

Additionally, there are two distinct types of language anxiety: debilitating anxiety and facilitating anxiety (Alpert & Haber, 1960). Scovel (1978) argued that confusing experimental data can be clarified by distinguishing between anxiety that facilitates and anxiety that inhibits. A consensus of studies focuses on debilitating anxiety, which negatively affects learners and adversely impacts their performance (Brown, 2007; Horwitz et al., 1986; Jones, 2004; MacIntyre, 1999; Oxford, 1999). The effects may be direct, such as decreased classroom participation, or indirect, including fear, frustration, and anxiety (Oxford, 1999). On the other hand, anxiety is facilitated when the task's level of difficulty induces the appropriate amount of anxiety. Facilitating anxiety assists language learners in a particular way in achieving proficiency. Several studies have recognized anxiety as a trait that may aid learners in overcoming their fears (Ellis, 1994). However, while some anxiety can be beneficial, excessive anxiety can make you feel flimsy, which could end up causing you to avoid work or perform poorly.

Multiple variables contribute to the development of language anxiety. Language anxiety stems from a fear of interaction, apprehension of a negative evaluation, and exam phobia (Horwitz et al., 1986). Price (1991) conducted a case study in which he identifies the potential causes of foreign or second language anxiety, such as an individual's perception of their language ability, special personality factors such as fear of speaking in public or fear of being judged, and an unfavorable classroom environment. Young (1991) suggested three aspects to explain the predominant causes of foreign or second language anxiety: the teacher, the learner, and the teaching process. He asserted that language anxiety stems from individual and social anxiety, views of language learners regarding language learning, teacher ideas about language teaching, teacher-learner interactions, teaching methods, and assessment procedures. Young (1994) elaborated on how these causes of language anxiety are interconnected.

In addition, the role of the teacher and the atmosphere of the classroom can contribute to foreign or second-language anxiety. For instance, calling on learners in foreign or second language classes may cause anxiety in learners. Moreover, the study reveals that teachers' impressions of learners' language anxiety can differ from the learner's own perspectives (Levine, 2003). According to Young (1994), unnatural classroom procedures, such as teachers' error-correction methods and how teachers interact with learners, contribute to the development of negative effects of language anxiety.

Study reveals that anxiety relating to foreign or second language has negative impacts on language acquisition (MacIntyre, 1999; Marwan, 2016). There are multiple ways to classify these effects. First, it may have an impact on academics. University performance is negatively correlated with increased levels of foreign language anxiety. Moreover, research has revealed a negative correlation between foreign or second-language anxiety and academic success (Horwitz, 2001). The dropout rate of learners contributes to the

academic effects. Therefore, Bailey, Onwuegbuzie, and Daley (2003) demonstrate that learners with high levels of anxiety are more likely to leave school than those with low levels of anxiety. Second, it may have a social impact. Learners with a high degree of anxiety are hesitant to engage in social interaction (Price, 1991). According to Horwitz et al. (2010), learners' reluctance to communicate in a foreign or second language is a result of language anxiety. Third, it may have a cognitive effect. Krashen (1982) suggests anxiety can function as an affective filter that inhibits data from accessing the cognitive processing system of a learner.

Two influential articles have significantly influenced research in the field of second-language acquisition on anxiety. Scovel (1978) found early perspectives on anxiety yielded inconclusive results regarding the relationship between anxiety and second language proficiency. Scovel (1978) attributed the contradictory and undefined findings to the use of diverse anxiety measures and conceptions of anxiety. He asserted that undefined experimental results can be clarified by distinguishing between anxiety that facilitates learning and anxiety that is debilitating. Anxiety is alleviated when the level of difficulty of the task induces the ideal amount of anxiety. Nevertheless, while some anxiety can be beneficial, excessive anxiety can lead to feelings of inadequacy, resulting in avoidance of work or poor performance.

In addition, the paper by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) is also noteworthy. The authors precisely described the foreign language anxiety concept. By situating language anxiety in the context of related anxiety concepts, the authors acknowledge that language anxiety is a situation-specific anxiety framework that is notably distinct from other types of anxiety. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale represents a significant contribution to their papers. This self-report instrument, which elicited anxiety responses unique to foreign language classroom settings, encouraged a number of similar studies. MacIntyre (1998) describes language anxiety as a form of situational anxiety. MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) theorized that situation-specific language anxiety develops gradually as a result of repeated anxiety experiences, causing the learner to relate foreign language class with anxiety. The findings of these studies demonstrate that learners who are learning a second or foreign language are negatively impacted by language anxiety in a number of ways.

Research has demonstrated that affective factors do not act independently; rather, the causal link between them is complex and requires additional study (Gardner, Tremblay, & Masgoret, 1997). It is always appealing and challenging to assess how these affective factors are interconnected and influence one another. For example, introversion and extroversion are associated with the arousal of anxiety (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996). It is usually assumed that introverted people are more likely to experience anxiety than extroverts (Brown, Robson, & Rosenkjar, 2001). Introverts typically prefer working alone to working in groups. On the

other hand, extroverts may experience discomfort if they are required to work alone constantly.

Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) discovered that the perfectionist behaviors of some language-anxious learners may contribute to their anxiety. They came to the conclusion that anxious learners and perfectionists exhibit many common traits, and that these common traits bear the potential to make language learning unpleasant. This conclusion is supported by the fact that anxious learners were less pleased with their achievements and more concerned with their mistakes than non-anxious learners, who were more likely to celebrate minor victories.

In addition, language anxiety is closely linked with attitudes and motivation. In Gardner's (1988) socio-educational model, for instance, the instrument is a classroom anxiety scale that measures the level of discomfort or anxiety among learners within the conceptual framework of attitudes and motivation. In addition, Ehrman (1996) argued psychological stability and self-esteem can be protected in a number of ways, including via what he termed "defense mechanisms." The emotional balancing mechanisms of anxious learners may consist of reluctance to assume an active role, task avoidance, and negative attitudes. In contrast, foreign or second language learners with high levels of competence were more psychologically balanced, more motivated, and less stressed (Brown et al., 2001).

Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, and Daley (2000) examined second-language anxiety. This study found foreign language anxiety had a significant impact on language achievement. Therefore, it is not entirely the result of a first-language coding deficit but rather an important emotional condition that may impede cognitive functioning in a language learner. In their respective debates, Sparks and Ganschow (1993) and MacIntyre (1995) presented opposing points of view on mechanism and contextualism. The debate focuses on whether cognitive abilities are distinct from other abilities, such as emotional or affective factors. MacIntyre's argument is strengthened by his consideration of the potential role of emotions in cognition. His statement permits the investigation of differences resulting from social or cultural distinctions.

Eysenck (1979) first identified the cognitive aspect of anxiety. He has long held the view that anxiety is characterized by worry and emotion. According to him, worry tends to refer to a person's concern regarding performance or the assessment of others. Emotionality refers to the negative emotions that precede physiological functioning. He asserted that anxious learners engage in task-irrelevant cognitive functioning more often than their less anxious peers. In a similar study conducted by Sellers (2000), anxious learners were more susceptible to distraction than their less anxious counterparts.

Horwitz (2001) argued that when addressing the issue of language anxiety and classroom practice, cultural differences must be taken into account. Certain practices may be perceived as stressful by learners from diverse cultural

backgrounds who are accustomed to a distinct classroom structure. Horwitz (2001) argued further that the classroom environment, teacher support, task orientation, and instructional emphasis all contribute to the anxiety of learners in the classroom. Cultural effects, including teacher and learner stereotypes and classroom activities, can differ considerably across cultures.

Additionally, Horwitz (1986) asserts that certain factors and practices are convenient and comfortable for one group of learners, while they may cause stress and anxiety for another group. Due to certain psychological and socio-cultural disparities, the author conducted the current study. This will contribute to the limited number of literature in foreign language acquisition in the context of Bangladesh.

#### *Theoretical Framework*

In addressing research issues connected to anxiety and anxiety variables while speaking English as a foreign or second language, the researcher explores the following theories and models:

The first framework is based on Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale. The authors develop a clear understanding of second and foreign language anxiety. They position the level of anxiety within the interrelated ideas of the anxiety concept and label it "situation-specific anxiety." This anxiety scale reveals the underlying causes of anxiety in the foreign or second language classroom. Furthermore, it paves the way for influential studies of a similar nature. These studies suggest that language anxiety negatively impacts foreign or second language classes in different situations.

Moreover, MacIntyre (1998) refers to anxiety as "situational anxiety." MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) argue that this type of anxiety develops gradually and persistently as a result of repeated exposure to anxious situations. Therefore, it adds anxiety to the experience of learning a foreign language. Both Horwitz et al. (1986) and MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) demonstrate the psychologically debilitating effects of anxiety associated with learning a foreign or second language.

The second framework corresponds with Krashen's (1982) theory of second language acquisition. He theorizes that language acquisition is not a conscious process but rather a subconscious one, as is the case when we all learn our native language. Acquisition requires exposure to language. Krashen terms this "comprehensible input." His theories of "comprehensible input" and "affective filter" imply that second language acquisition is possible if one is exposed to languages, has positive attitudes toward the language, and has little or no anxiety.

The third framework is associated with Gardner's (1988) socio-educational model, which emphasizes social connectedness. In addition, he emphasized the importance of psychological identification with culturally diverse groups. Regarding the acquisition of a second or foreign language, he

also emphasizes the significance of having a favorable feeling towards other cultural groups.

### III. METHOD

The analysis of data in this study was conducted using qualitative techniques. Qualitative techniques investigate how human behavior can be defined within the context of the social structures within which it occurs (Flick, Von, & Steinke, 2004). The objective was to figure out what participants said and why they said it. The methods were designed to enable respondents to express themselves without restraint. In this study, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with 39 Bangladeshi tertiary learners in order to collect qualitative data to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to speaking or communication anxiety. The semi-structured interviews used in this qualitative study (Rosalind & Janet, 2013) to track all verbal and non-verbal reactions, such as instant feelings, comfort, and pauses or silence, in order to reveal instant personal behaviors that could be useful in the resulting data analysis of multiple themes derived from the discussion (Ritchie et al., 2013). Focus groups were believed to be the most efficient way to collect qualitative data for this study (Patton, 2002).

The participants of this study were tertiary-level learners from two universities located in Chattogram, Bangladesh. Focus group discussion and interviews were adopted because they were believed to be the most effective methods for acquiring insight into a variety of intricate underlying issues. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. The researcher analyzed the data before applying a logical method to them. All transcribed data were stored in a Microsoft Word document, and the researcher used a printed form to code and compile a list of primary and secondary themes. To get a sense of the interview as a whole, the transcripts were carefully reviewed from beginning to conclusion. The research questions guided the categorization and coding of data. Approximately 20–25 minutes were allotted for the interview of each participant. The anxiety sources mentioned by learners are listed in Table 1. Several of the entries contained reflective commentary on their own experiences (Bailey, 1983). The entries in this study centered on emotional classroom occurrences that prompted an emotional response from learners. A list of interview questions is given in Appendix A. All participants were informed of the purpose of the study and their freedom to withdraw at any time. Participants' personal information was not collected or stored.

#### *Limitation of the Study*

It is extremely challenging to ensure that collected data reflect the opinions of respondents. The participants' inability to express themselves precisely can lead to misinterpretation of the information. Humans are fallible by nature; therefore, they can make mistakes. Exhaustion, personal bias, and interpretation errors can all contribute to these mistakes during focus group discussion and even in the interviews.

Due to time constraints, the sample size for this study is restricted to 39 learners from two universities in the Chattogram district – one public and one private – who participated in a focus group discussion and semi-structured interviews. However, these findings cannot be generalized to the entire population of Bangladeshi university EFL learners. It may require more participants, institutions, and time to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

#### IV. RESULTS

On the basis of the frequency of comments in responses from participants, the identified barriers that caused anxiety and affected the language proficiency of Bangladeshi EFL tertiary-level learners could be categorized into two primary themes: psychological and socio-cultural. The results demonstrated how the negative effects of the identified factors impeded the acquisition of a foreign or second language such as English.

##### *Psychological Barriers Faced by Learners*

###### *The Classroom Environment and Teachers*

The rigid and structured classroom environment may intensify the anxiety associated with speaking. In this study, Bangladeshi learners of English at the tertiary level reported that authoritative coursework caused them a great deal of stress. Learners experienced emotional distress. They continued by stating that a teacher with excessive authority could be cause for concern. Several learners stated, “I do not feel confident and at ease if the English classroom is strict and conventional and the teacher does not encourage the learners.” Consequently, learners became passive listeners and did not participate in the lesson.

Participants also reported the role of teachers and the classroom activities contributed to classroom anxiety. Some of their teachers directly criticized and ridiculed them in class, whether deliberately or unconsciously. This caused learners to experience anxiety. Many teachers question and compare the cognitive capabilities of their learners frequently. Respondents reported, “At times, teachers compare my talents to those of my proactive classmates; I become frustrated and anxious.” These comparisons of the language processing abilities of the learners had a substantial impact on the academic environment. Consequently, they were always apprehensive about presenting their ideas or views in class. Literally, language production became stalled. As they added, “We want a classroom environment in which we can talk freely and without fear, so that our foreign language learning is facilitated and becomes a pleasant experience for us. Effective learning is practically impossible in the absence of a favorable atmosphere.”

One participant added, “Being positively acknowledged by teachers fosters satisfaction and confidence. I have a positive attitude regarding errors and worry since I now view them as a regular feature of the language-learning process.” She seemed

to have developed in terms of responsibility and understanding of what it takes to learn a foreign language.

##### *Peer Comparison*

The participants evaluated and felt their friends and classmates spoke English more fluently and had a greater vocabulary than they had, and this disparity concerned them. One respondent commented, “Some of my classmates are more confident and willing to respond when a teacher asks about something in class since they speak fluently.” There was a significant disparity in skills. Therefore, they avoided giving presentations, participating in group discussions, and potentially taking oral exams. “I’m afraid that others will laugh at me and assume my English is poor,” they continued, “particularly because many of my peers are outstanding speakers.” Due to their inadequate English language skills, the majority of learners feared being judged by their classmates and friends, both within and outside of the classroom.

##### *Anxiety and Fear*

One of the reported psychological impediments was communication anxiety. According to respondents, they felt more worried while listening to and speaking English than when writing or reading it. They responded, “When the teacher asks me to speak, I experience fear and anxiety; my throat dries up; I begin to look about; I get self-conscious, assuming that the entire world is watching me or listening to me.” Consequently, they became increasingly agitated.

##### *Insufficient Self-esteem*

According to respondents, a poor confidence level prevented them from conveying the desired message. However, they were fully aware that confidence was a key component of good communication. Interviewees noted, “When I cannot speak English words correctly, I lose confidence and am quite anxious due to poor pronunciation and grammar usage.” Learners at the tertiary level in Bangladesh are unable to speak foreign languages successfully due to a lack of self-confidence.

##### *Inferiority Syndrome*

There were several learners who learned quickly and had an exceptional memory. They achieved the anticipated success with less effort. Some of them were quick learners; some were not. Slow learners must exert significantly more effort to acquire a foreign or second language. Many of them suffered from inferiority complexes because they believed their peers to be significantly more intelligent, agile, and highly skilled. Participants confirmed they experienced inferiority complexes when speaking in front of peers with superior skills. Several respondents indicated they were fully aware of the fact that quick cognitive response was the linchpin of demonstrable language proficiency. However, they considered themselves to be slow and reported that, “unlike my proactive classmates, I am slow to respond. It takes me a long time to produce

a sentence in English. I first think in Bengali before I attempt a translation into English. I am less competent than my peers.”

#### *Pronunciation*

Pronunciation is regarded as a major impediment for foreign and second-language learners because it has an immediate impact on how they interact with one another. It is crucial to be comprehensible when speaking so that others can understand you. That is the essence of effective verbal communication. However, it is not so simple for all second or foreign language learners to attain an acceptable level of pronunciation. All of the interviewees stated that poor pronunciation caused them stress and anxiety about being misunderstood by their audience. As stated by one of the participants, “I fear conversing with others, particularly those with significantly better accents; I am confused and apprehensive when engaging in conversation in English; due to my terrible accent, I feel uncomfortable and it takes me a considerable amount of effort to develop proper phrases or speeches.” Their poor accents had become a source of nightmares for them. It made them anxious and made the acquisition of English more difficult for them.

#### *Introversion and Reticence*

The study revealed a number of anxiety-provoking issues in Bangladeshi EFL tertiary learners. The introverted personality was one of those themes. Due to their quiet and introverted personalities, they frequently wished to remain unseen and unobserved. Three participants in the study reported they were chronically shy and, hence, were unwilling to interact in English because they were conscious of their inability to do so.

Introversion was identified as a key element in eliciting reluctance when learning a foreign language. Introversion was linked to anxiety, agitation, and reticence, which all negatively affected their English language learning.

#### *Insufficient Grammatical and Lexical Knowledge*

The study also identified a lack of grammatical and lexical knowledge as a source of anxiety. It was found to be one of the variables related to language anxiety in the academic environment of learning a foreign language. Interaction was hindered by an excessive focus on grammatical and lexical norms. Most of the learners agreed, “I find it difficult to initiate a conversation in English because I have a strong intuition that my knowledge of grammar is inadequate; I consistently make grammatical errors; I am incapable of employing the appropriate words or expressions when the situation calls for them.”

#### *Learners Confronted with Social Issues*

##### *Insufficient Comprehensible Input*

Krashen’s (1982) comprehensible input hypothesis highlighted the importance of second language exposure and its fundamental role in SLA. Exposure to the target language

is a great source of comprehensible input that can lead to optimal and effective output. Little or no interaction with English-speaking people within or outside the country; a lack of English-language practice outside the classroom; inadequate use of English on social media; reluctance to read English books, newspapers, and magazines; reluctance to watch English movies and podcasts; and the use of Bengali in an English-language classroom all contributed to the communication apprehension of the participants of this study. The majority stated, “I have practically no opportunities to speak with native speakers, or my English proficiency is so poor that I lack the confidence to communicate with them; I converse in Bengali on social media platforms, such as Whatsapp, Viber, and Messenger; I listen to the news in Bengali; I speak Bengali in all of my social interactions; my peers do not speak English even when our English-speaking teachers are present or away from the classroom.” The findings suggested limited exposures to English in or outside of class, as well as a lack of comprehensible input, were significant barriers to the development of effective communication skills in English. It indicated greater exposure to the target language was critical for efficient foreign or second-language communication.

#### *An Apprehension of Cultural Exclusion*

In addition to other anxiety-inducing factors, this study found some Bangladeshi learners believed if they learned or spoke English, they would lose their cultural values. Some respondents expressed unfavorable attitudes toward second-language acquisition and communication. According to some respondents, they sometimes felt more attracted to western cultures and languages, such as English and French, and they feared losing their cultural identity. The majority of participants, however, were enthusiastic about learning English and other foreign languages.

#### *Regional Background*

Learners’ regional background was linked to their communication and speaking skills, which might be influenced by a number of factors. Some participants stated they were upset when they discovered many of their urban classmates or friends learned English from reputable institutes or in major metropolitan areas and therefore performed or responded better in the classroom. They believed growing up in urban and affluent areas had significantly improved their English proficiency.

#### *Parents’ Function*

In the current study, the role of parents and their influence was identified as an additional important factor that could play a significant role in either intensifying or alleviating learners’ language anxiety. According to some respondents, their parents were unaware of the growing demand for foreign languages such as English, German, French, Spanish, etc. They did not send them to any schools or institutions for learning a foreign language that were available nearby. They did not motivate learners to study and speak English at home

or in public. Therefore, the learners lacked confidence and had communication anxiety.

Conversely, some learners reported attending English-medium schools during their early years of study. They had a minimum of 12 years of education in the English medium, including “O” and “A” levels. In addition, their parents had provided them with all the available assistance. Then, they communicated with ease and confidence in English. They were not anxious about studying English as a second language.

Some parents found in this study discouraged their children from learning and speaking a foreign language, such as English. They believed learning western languages such as English would cause learners to forget their native socio-religious norms. Parents and their attitudes were also a significant source of anxiety.

Table 1. Reported Sources of Anxiety

Reported Sources of Language Anxiety	Numbers of Learners Experiencing Anxiety	Learners Experiencing Anxiety (%)
Fear of mocking from peers	22	56
English language phobia	16	41
Challenging family situations	07	18
English language difficulty	17	44
Attitude of teachers	37	95
Peer comparisons	28	72
Teachers' feedback strategies	29	74
Taking tests	13	33
Oral performance during examinations	29	74
Parents' attitude	07	18

## V. DISCUSSION

Bangladeshi EFL learners at the tertiary level experience a high level of language anxiety due to psychological, linguistic, and socio-cultural barriers. These affective barriers are closely tied to the learners' subjective experiences and beliefs regarding classroom activities, as well as their teachers' and peers' perceptions of them. EFL learners become anxious when speaking in front of their teachers and classmates because they fear being negatively evaluated by their teachers and ridiculed by their classmates. This occurs due to their perception that they lack the necessary experience and skills. As a result, they become (or continue to be) reserved in certain classroom situations. These findings support Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's (1986) model of anxiety in the foreign language classroom as having a significant affective impact on SLA.

The present study's results also validate Krashen's (1982) SLA theory. When affective filters are elevated, fear, low self-confidence, and a lack of motivation impede the acquisition process of learners. The majority of respondents agreed that

insufficient comprehensible input and little or no exposure to English contributed to their lack of self-confidence and motivation. In addition, the findings of this study indicated that a shy personality, introverted nature, and other personality variables caused psychological barriers and anxiety in Bangladeshi EFL tertiary learners, which is consistent with the findings of MacIntyre & Charos (1996), who identified self-perceptions and personality traits as significant factors in provoking reticence in EFL learners. In addition, the findings of this study shed light on linguistic variables such as a lack of mastery of grammar and vocabulary, which are also contributing to anxiety.

In addition, the results revealed that anxiety was caused by socio-cultural factors, such as lack of English exposure, parental education level, regional background, and exclusion. These findings are consistent with Gardner's (1988) socio-educational model of SLA. Fear of losing their own cultural identity left a debilitating impression on the minds of the learners and demotivated them to learn an influential foreign language such as English. Their parents did not demonstrate sufficient awareness to assume the responsibility of alleviating their children's anxiety and facilitating their foreign language learning. In this regard, socio-educational awareness is completely absent, and the parental role as a social entity cannot be overlooked. Acquisition of a second or foreign language does not involve losing one's identity. Rather, it is a means of self-discovery in relation to other cultures that facilitates a deeper understanding of oneself.

This study demonstrates that the respondents suffer from inferiority complexes because they perceive some of their peers and friends to be cognitively more efficient. They cannot demonstrate adequate communication skills in front of these English-language experts. They lack confidence in their own cognitive responses due to anxiety. Their cognitive processes become stalled, whereas their classmates who are more efficient are quick to respond. This finding is consistent with the findings of MacIntyre (1995), who concedes language anxiety is a component of social anxiety, which arises mainly from the social interaction and communicative aspects of language acquisition. Anxiety, cognition, and behavior are interconnected in a predefined sequence.

Feedback is an essential part of the fundamental structure of education. It assists learners in enhancing their inadequate learning strategies. The findings of this study indicate, however, that feedback may also be authoritative, resulting in a negative evaluation of the language ability of the learners. By drawing parallels to external standards, such as speaking or peer group criteria, e.g., the success of other classmates, it can send negative messages to learners that can debilitate their motivation and energy to learn (Dörnyei, 1994). This trend of social comparison has prevailed in Bangladeshi tertiary-level educational institutions and classroom settings. It impedes the intrinsic motivation of learners (Carole, 1992). The debilitating comparison between

peers creates a negative classroom environment and impedes the harmony of group learning. The position of the teacher in the classroom can be either beneficial or detrimental. When learners perceive their teachers as authoritative, anxiety rises and they are less likely to learn. However, when they perceive their teachers as supportive, anxiety decreases and they are more likely to learn. It suggests that supportive authority increases learner engagement, whereas controlling authority decreases it, which can be an impediment to their academic success (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Littlewood, 2000).

## VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Language anxiety is a prevailing, undeniable reality, especially among second and foreign language learners. It is essential to approach it from various individual perspectives consisting of multiple psychological grounds. Language anxiety is not an ancillary factor that can be excluded from the fundamental concept of second or foreign language acquisition. It is an influential and affective aspect of learning a foreign language. Individual differences in factors like affect and motivation are viewed as integral to the development of cognitive skills (Smith, 2000). It is crucial to consider the social cognitive approach in order to emphasize the importance of incorporating cognitive and social factors (Lewis & Carpendale, 2004).

According to MacIntyre (1998), it is crucial to place a strong emphasis on speaking or interactive language skills. However, he also emphasized the growing awareness of the need for initiatives, strategies, and their development to alleviate anxiety. Some factors, such as teachers' error-correcting procedures and their approach to learners, may cause anxiety in learners. Therefore, pedagogical planning and initiatives should incorporate learners' affective factors into the curriculum to a substantial degree. Teachers should create a welcoming and fearless classroom environment for their learners so that they will participate willingly and engage in meaningful interaction. The study explored anxiety associated with foreign or second language acquisition, which may serve as a guide for teachers to help their learners generate better ideas and understand foreign or second language acquisition from the learners' point of view.

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