

Foreign Language Anxiety: A Study on Spanish Learners

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Abstract

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) as a crucial affective variable has been unexplored in the context of the Spanish language. This paper reports a study that investigated Spanish language anxiety (SLA) and its potential causes and inquired into the relationship between the role of a teacher and SLA. A mixed-methods research design was adopted, including a questionnaire [Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)], semi-structured interviews, and observation as data collection among the undergraduates (female = 32, male = 18) and Spanish teachers (2). The FLCAS data revealed that students experience low to moderate anxiety, with communication apprehension being highly rated (mean = 3.26) followed by fear of negative evaluation (mean = 2.8) and test anxiety (mean = 2.25). The interview data recorded listening and speaking tasks, fear of negative evaluation, teacher talk, negative self-comparison, and previous bad language learning experiences are the prominent sources of anxiety. In this context, Spanish teachers are found to reduce students' anxiety mostly by giving interesting activities, accepting students' mistakes, and using body language. This paper offers insight into the causes that trigger FLA and an impactful relationship between a teacher's role and FLA. Some suggestions are proposed for teachers based on the findings to mitigate students' anxiety.

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning a second or foreign language is a complex process as it is influenced by some affective variables. According to Scovel (1978, as in Ellis, 1994), affective factors or learner variables are linked to emotional responses and learner motives such as anxiety, motivation, and confidence. According to this viewpoint, Krashen (1982) came up with the affective filter hypothesis, which states that affective variables might cause obstacles in the language learning process by preventing inputs from becoming intakes. Among all the variables, anxiety as an influential affective factor has been extensively studied in the field of foreign language education over the past few decades (Scovel, 1978, cited in Ellis, 1994).

Primarily, anxiety is a psychosomatic term that psychologists define as “a state of uneasiness and fear, a vague anxiety that is specifically associated with a particular object or phenomenon (Hilgard et al., 1979, cited in Hakim, 2019). However, FLA, being different from anxiety, is defined by Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 128) as the feeling of tension, apprehension, and nervousness associated with learning a foreign language.

Language educators agree that one of the biggest challenges that language learners encounter in learning a foreign language is anxiety that arises from the language-learning process (Alrabai, 2014; Wu, 2010). Notably, the growing number of anxious learners in language

classes is alarming (Horwitz & Young, 1991). A substantial number of studies conducted in recent years in different contexts found speaking (Gkonou, 2011; Lio & Jackson, 2008; Al Saraj, 2014), fear of negative evaluation (Fadlan, 2020; Yamini and Tahriri, 2006; Lio & Jackson, 2008; Al-Saraj, 2014), low self-perceived foreign language proficiency, low self-esteem (Mahmoodzadeh, 2013; Liu & Jackson, 2008), and test anxiety (Wei, 2014; Fadlan, 2020; Gopan et al., 2017) to be the sources of anxiety among the students in the classrooms. More recently, Kruk (2018) stressed that the attitudes and personality of a teacher can be a potential source of students' anxiety. Some recent studies investigated the correlation of anxiety with other factors related to academic success, such as achievement and performance (Riasati, 2011; Von Worde, 2003, cited in Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019; Marcos-Llinas et al., 2009; Sultana, 2018), self-efficacy (Dornyei, 2009; Piniel & Csizer, 2013), and class participation (Das, 2020). All these studies pointed out that higher anxiety leads to low achievement, low self-efficacy, and less class participation. According to Elaldi (2016), more studies and investigations are needed into language anxiety because it poses serious problems for EFL learners that can impair their performance and accomplishments.

Based on the previous studies, there are still some issues in FLA yet to be explored. Firstly, FLA is a widespread phenomenon that is not limited to the English language classroom but is also observed in other languages like Spanish or French as well as less frequently taught languages like Arabic and Japanese (Kondo, 2005; Sila, 2010; Noels, 2001; Rodriguez & Abreu, 2003; Elkhafai, 2005; William & Andrade, 2008, cited in Diafri & Wimbari, 2018). However, in Bangladesh, most studies examined English language anxiety (Ferdous, 2012; Nimat, 2013; Kabir, 2015; Zaman, 2017; Sultana, 2018; Das, 2021; Hera & Saha, 2023, cited in Al Mamun, 2021). Secondly, anxiety, being of a multifaceted nature, needs to be examined holistically (Ohata, 2005, cited in Tanveer, 2007); however, there has been less research dealing with FLA from different angles. Hence, this current study aimed to examine FLA and its possible sources in the context of the Spanish language, both from the perspective of the teacher and students. Further inquiry was placed on the teacher's role in reducing or creating anxiety in the classroom.

This study is set to answer the following questions:

- a) To what extent do Spanish learners experience anxiety?
- b) What are the anxiety-inducing factors for the students in the Spanish class?
- c) What part does the teacher play in generating or reducing Spanish learners' anxiety?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Concept of Anxiety

Descriptive research on language anxiety dates back to the early 1970s; since then, the idea of anxiety has been conceptualized from different points of view by different researchers and scholars. According to the American Psychiatric Association (cited in Spielberger, 1972, p. 109), "anxiety is apprehension, tension, or uneasiness that stems from the anticipation of danger, the source of which is largely unknown or unrecognized." Scovel (1991, p. 18) stated, "Anxiety is a psychological construct, commonly described by psychologists as a state of apprehension, a vague fear that is only indirectly associated with an object." Afterward, Horwitz et al. (1986) came up with the FLA term and defined it as an individual's unique set of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and actions associated with language learning in the

classroom. Further, Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 129) stated that FLA is "a phenomenon related to but distinguishable from other specific anxieties." FLA is not the same as state anxiety, which arises in reaction to a situation and goes away after the threats or events pass. It is also different from trait anxiety, which is constant and obvious in all circumstances (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1991). FLA differs from the other three types of anxiety as it is caused by a specific set of circumstances, such as giving a speech in front of an audience or engaging in class.

2.2.Sources of Anxiety

To mitigate language anxiety among students, several researchers and educators started looking into the possible sources of anxiety. The earlier literature on causes of anxiety has identified various sources leading to anxiety, such as communicative apprehension, fear of failing, and fear of negative evaluation, as potential causes of anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986; Aida, 1994). However, in the mid-1990s, Sparks and Ganschow estimated that anxiety is related to one's native language ability and stems from poor native language skills. MacIntyre (1999) criticized Sparks's definition, saying language anxiety is not related to one's native language disabilities but rather should be seen as an independent component that can hinder language learning situations.

Other notable factors were found to have tremendous roles in instigating anxiety. Learners' characteristics and their beliefs about language learning and perceptions are the essential causes of anxiety (Bailey, 1983; Luo, 2012; Dewaele, 2005; Young, 1991). To illustrate, Bailey (1983) asserted that the competitive character of learners can generate anxiety because students frequently compare themselves to others and idealize them, which often leads to low self-esteem and eventually causes anxiety. Further, after conducting a longitudinal study on learners' beliefs using the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) based on the fact that learners' beliefs about language learning affect their performance, Peacock (2001) concluded that learners tend to achieve native-like accents, and the conflict between learners' beliefs and reality is one of the potential sources of anxiety. Hakim (2019) also noted that the pressure to achieve native-like mastery creates anxiety among Saudi Arabian students.

Since speaking was found to be a common source of anxiety, some researchers attempted to find out the specific reasons for speaking anxiety. Awan et al. (2010, as cited in Hakim, 2019), investigated the specific causes that arise in speaking anxiety among undergraduate English students. Speaking in front of others, concerns about grammar mistakes, pronunciation mistakes, and a lack of fluency are some of the reasons that cause anxiety for the students. In research on "Factors causing Language Anxiety of EFL Students in Classroom Presentation," Fadlan (2020) added some new findings, where he found that the inability to find proper words, inferiority complex, poor pronunciation, lack of proficiency, and insufficient experience in presentation can create anxiety. Hakim (2019) pointed out that students' self-consciousness about their oral production instigates speaking anxiety among Saudi Arabian students.

Recent studies also found external factors, i.e., societal factors, to affect foreign language anxiety among students. A study on language anxiety among English language learners in Saudi Arabia found that a feeling of alienation stemming from varying social status creates anxiety among many students (Hakim, 2019). Furthermore, family pressure and expectations are also found to be sources of anxiety (ÇELEBİ, 2009; Alico, 2015).

Besides that, many researchers have confirmed that the language classroom itself is a potential source of anxiety (Luo, 2012; Young, 1991). Many students relate seating arrangements (ÇELEBİ, 2009), unnatural classroom procedures (Zeng, 2008), and strict and tense classrooms (Hakim, 2019) to the source of anxiety.

Some studies have investigated anxiety in terms of four language skills. Brantmeier (2005) conducted a study with Spanish learners where he looked for the level of reading anxiety in comparison with other language skills. The result indicated that students are less anxious about writing; however, they are equally anxious about speaking, listening, and reading. Even so, they feel more anxiety when they are asked to do a reading activity, followed by communicative apprehension. However, Ran et al. (2022) conducted a study with medical students in China to investigate their level of anxiety in terms of different skills. He found that students had the highest anxiety related to listening and the lowest anxiety related to reading. Thus, the level of anxiety may vary in terms of different language skills.

In the Bangladeshi context, English-language anxiety has been examined in different contexts. Nimat (2013, cited in Hera & Shaha, 2023) found that fear of failure, incomprehensible input, and remembering target rules and grammar are the major sources of students' anxiety. Das (2020, cited in Al Mamun, 2021) looked at the impact of anxiety on class participation. He found a negative relationship between anxiety and class participation in terms of both urban and rural students.

2.3. Student Anxiety and the Role of the Teacher

Language teachers' acts and applications in the classroom have a strong connection with students' anxiety. (Brandi, 1987; Horwitz et al., 1986; Price, 1991; Tsui, 1996, as cited in Hakim, 2019; Young, 1991; Zeng, 2008; ÇELEBİ, 2009; Al-Saraj, 2014; Luo, 2012). The nature of teachers' correction of errors, teacher talk, and the way teachers interact with students determine the level of anxiety. Non-supportive ways of error correction (Horwitz et al., 1986), facing teachers' questions (Fadlan, 2020), and fear of being negatively evaluated by teachers in front of peers (Jones, 2004; Lio & Jackson, 2008; Luo, 2012; Gopan et al., 2017) can induce anxiety. On the other hand, teachers' support and friendly nature (Trickett & Moos, 1995) and providing informative feedback (Noels et al., 1999, cited in Djafri & Wimbart, 2018) can reduce anxiety. In the Bangladeshi context, it is also identified that teacher support and involvement in class activities are the preferred strategies for the students to feel less anxious in the L2 classroom (Khan, 2015; Sultana, 2018; cited in Hera & Shaha, 2023). Even teachers' way of treating students determines the level of students' participation in the class. Tanveer (2007) reported that one thing that negatively impacts students' motivation to participate in class activities is teachers' patronizing and insensitive behavior toward them, especially when they make mistakes. Similarly, Jones (2004) claims that teachers who treat students' mistakes improperly and make them feel ashamed in front of their peers might harm students' learning.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

The present study employed a mixed-methods research approach. The qualitative data were gathered using interviews and observation, and on the other hand, quantitative data were collected through the FLCAS questionnaire. According to Price (1991), most studies on foreign language anxiety fall into the quantitative paradigm. However, a mixed-methods approach allows a variety of data collection instruments and methods of analysis, which contributes to a deeper insight into the research problem and a stronger basis for validation as a means of triangulation than either approach. (Thomas, 2005, cited in ÇELEBİ, 2009).

3.2. Participants

The study was conducted with the first-year undergrad students of the English Language Department at the Institute of Modern Languages (IML) in Dhaka University, who learn the Spanish language as a compulsory course of their BA curriculum. This convenience sample was 100% Bengalis, adding up to 32 female and 18 male students aged between 20 and 21. Further, two Spanish teachers from IML participated in a semi-structured interview. Between them, one was a 35-year-old native of Bengali who had been teaching Spanish as a foreign language for a year, while the other was a 38-year-old native of Spanish with five years of teaching experience.

3.3. Instruments

3.3.1. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale

(FLCAS) The FLCAS is a model constructed by Horwitz et al. (1986) that measures FLA among language learners. The FLCAS model has proved to be valid in many studies across the world (Horwitz et al., 1986; Huang, 2008; Young & Das, 2020, 1991; Zhao, 2007; Alrabai, 2014, cited in Al Mamun, 2021). FLCAS contains 33 statements to determine language learners' anxiety built upon three constructs: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. These items are measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Some modifications were introduced to the FLCAS items to make them more context-appropriate, such as the word "foreign" in FLCAS being replaced with Spanish and all FLCAS items being homogeneous, making some negative statements into positive ones (2, 5, 8, 14, 18, 22, 28, 32) for an accurate overall mean. Previously, many studies (Horwitz et al., 1986; Saito Horwitz & Garza, 1999; Aida, 1994; Truitt, 1995; Batiha Mohd Noor & Mustaffa, 2014, cited in Al Mamun, 2021) found FLCAS to be a reliable instrument.

3.3.2. Semi-structured Interview

"Semi-structured interviews are those that consist of several key questions, which can help establish the scope that is to be explored and also allow the interviewer or interviewee to get more detailed ideas or responses" (Fadlan, 2020, p. 14). The interview questions were taken from ÇELEBİ's (2009) study on the possible sources of anxiety among Turkish students (see Appendix 3).

3.3.3. Observation

Observation is a great means of triangulating data. As Taylor & Bogdan (1998, p. 80, cited in ÇELEBİ, 2009) said, "By drawing on other types and sources of data," researchers may accomplish "a deeper and clearer understanding of the setting and the people being studied." As the classroom environment might be related to the feeling of anxiety, observation is involved to get a better idea of the classroom environment and the teacher's behavior.

3.3.4. Data collection procedure

First of all, a pilot study was carried out on 20 students at the English language department on October 8, 2019, to check the reliability of the questionnaire. Secondly, the questionnaires were distributed to the target participants with consent, and they were given adequate instructions and sufficient time to fill out the questionnaire. Thirdly, informed consent was obtained from the students and the Spanish teachers for being interviewed and recorded. The whole interview session lasted for 7–10 minutes with each teacher and 3-5 minutes with each student. Finally, the researcher observed a total of four classes over two weeks to triangulate the generated responses from the participants. A checklist was used during the observation developed by the researcher (see Appendix 4).

3.4. Analysis of Data

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 17 is used to analyze FLCAS data, which shows descriptive statistics in terms of mean analysis. Secondly, the interview data were analyzed thematically. For that, the researcher read the transcription and started to look for patterns by reflecting on the transcription, and if a comment occurred more than once, it was taken as a potential comment and arranged sequentially. Similarly, thematic analysis is very useful in finding out people’s experiences, views, and opinions. The six-step thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006, cited in ÇELEBİ, 2009) was used in the categorization of the emerging themes in this study. The steps are: familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, search for themes, review of themes, defining and naming of themes, and production of the report. Finally, the observation data have been transcribed from the checklist. After that, the observation data were compared with the interview data using a triangular method.

3.5. Ethical consideration

The present study was conducted at the Institute of Modern Languages at Dhaka University. Before the collection of data, participants’ willingness to participate in the study is also sought via a consent form, and they are assured that their responses will remain confidential and be used only for the sole purpose of research. Further, permission was sought from the director and faculties of the Spanish Department for the observation of the Spanish classes.

4. RESULTS

FLCAS data

<Table 1> Mean ranges and their equivalent anxiety level (as cited in Alico, 2015)

Mean Range	Anxiety level
1.00 -1.79	Very low
1.80-2.59	Low
2.60-3.39	Moderate
3.40-4.19	High
4.20-5.00	Very high

<Table 2> Description of students’ anxiety under communicative apprehension

F= Frequency, %= Percentage

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		SA	A	N	D	SD		Mean
Item 1	%	8%	56%	12%	24%	0%	100%	3.48
	F	4	28	6	12	0	50	
Item 3	%	0%	20%	24%	20%	36%	100%	2.28
	F	0	10	12	10	18	50	
Item 4	%	24%	16%	4%	40%	16%	100%	2.92
	F	12	8	2	20	8	50	
Item 5	%	24%	48%	12%	8%	8%	100%	4.80
	F	12	24	24	4	4	50	
Item 6	%	8%	16%	8%	52%	16%	100%	2.48
	F	4	8	4	26	8	50	
Item 9	%	28%	48%	12%	8%	4%	100%	
	F	14	24	6	4	2	50	3.88
Item 11	%	24%	52%	24%	0%	0%	100%	4
	F	12	26	12	0	0	50	
Item 12	%	4%	28%	12%	46%	8%	100%	2.72
	F	2	14	6	24	4	50	
Item 13	%	32%	44%	8%	12%	4%	100%	4.28
	F	16	22	4	16	2	50	
Item 14	%	8%	12%	12%	52%	16%	100%	2.44
	F	4	6	6	26	8	50	
Item 15	%	32%	52%	8%	8%	0%	100%	4.08
	F	16	26	4	4	0	50	
Item 16	%	12%	16%	16%	32%	24%	100%	2.6
	F	6	8	8	16	12	50	
Item 17	%	12%	20%	16%	30%	22%	100%	2.7
	F	6	10	8	15	11	50	
Item 18	%	12%	56%	12%	20%	4%	100%	3.48
	F	6	26	6	10	2	50	
Item 20	%	4%	20%	20%	32%	24%	100%	2.48
	F	2	10	10	16	12	50	
Item 22	%	6%	14%	18%	40%	22%	100%	
	F	3	7	9	20	11	50	2.42
Item 24	%	12%	40%	12%	32%	4%	100%	3.24
	F	6	20	6	16	2	50	
Item 26	%	24%	24%	12%	24%	16%	100%	
	F	12	12	6	12	8	50	3.16
Item 27	%	48%	32%	8%	12%	0%	100%	4.16
	F	24	16	4	6	0	50	
Item 28	%	28%	12%	16%	44%	28%	100%	3.52
	F	14	6	8	22	14	50	
Item 29	%	22%	38%	12%	18%	10%	100%	3.44
	F	11	19	6	9	5	50	
Item 30	%	16%	28%	20%	24%	12%	100%	3.12
	F	8	14	10	12	6	50	
Item 32	%	0%	32%	16%	32%	20%	100%	2.6
	F	0	16	8	16	10	50	
Item 33	%	48%	32%	8%	6%	6%	100%	4.1
	F	24	16	4	3	3	50	
Total=								78.38
Overall mean=								3.26

Table 2 represents the level of anxiety of Spanish language learners in communicative apprehension of FLCAS. Item 15 and 5 show respectively that as much as 84% of students feel anxious when they do not understand the teacher's speech and thinking about taking more

foreign language classes. Further, 80% of students agreed that they get scared whenever they are required to answer the teacher's question, as in item 33. Next, 76% of students reported that they became anxious when they had to speak without any preparation, as in item 9. The overall mean score rated for communicative apprehension is as high as 3.26.

<Table 3> Description of students' anxiety under Test anxiety

		SA	A	N	D	SD		Mean
Item 8	%	0%	32%	16%	44%	8%	100%	2.72
	F	0	16	8	22	4	50	
Item 10	%	8%	16%	4%	28%	44%	100%	2.16
	F	4	8	2	14	22	50	
Item 21	%	8%	4%	4%	36%	48%	100%	1.88
	F	4	2	2	18	24	50	
Total=								6.76
Overall mean=								2.25

Table 3 shows Spanish learners are less anxious about the test, as 52% of students disagreed that they are not worried about the consequences of failing the language class test, and 84% of students reported that they don't get confused while studying for a test.

<Table 4> Description of Students' Anxiety under Negative Evaluation

		SA	A	N	D	SD		Mean
Item 2	%	0%	36%	16%	12%	36%	100%	2.52
	F	0	18	8	6	18	50	
Item 7	%	24%	28%	20%	20%	8%	100%	3.4
	F	12	14	10	10	4	50	
Item 19	%	4%	12%	8%	40%	36%	100%	2.08
	F	2	6	4	20	18	50	
Item 23	%	12%	64%	4%	16%	4%	100%	3.64
	F	6	32	2	8	2	50	
Item 25	%	12%	12%	0%	32%	44%	100%	2.16
	F	6	6	0	16	22	50	
Item 31	%	12%	32%	20%	16%	20%	100%	3
	F	6	16	10	8	10	50	
Total=								16.8

Table 4 identifies students' anxiety regarding negative evaluations. The data reveals that the majority of the Spanish learners think themselves worse than other students and is afraid of being negatively judged by their peers, as followed by items 23 and 31. The overall mean score for this construct stands at 2.8.

<Table 5> General level of L2 anxiety

Anxiety variables	Mean score	Anxiety level
Communicative apprehension	3.26	Moderate Anxiety
Test anxiety	2.25	Low anxiety
Negative evaluation	2.8	Low anxiety

Table 5 shows, Spanish learners' anxiety level associated with the three components of FLCAS. To illustrate, communicative apprehension is the main source of anxiety, with a mean score of 3.26. However, students are found to be less anxious about the test anxiety and negative evaluation, with a mean score of 2.25 and 2.8, respectively. Their overall anxiety level is low to moderate.

5.1. Anxiety-Creating Factors in the Spanish Classroom

5.1.1. Student's perspective

Twenty students were interviewed on the factors that cause anxiety in the Spanish classroom. The generated answers went through thematic analysis and were categorized as follows:

5.1.2. Listening tasks

Listening to audio is a potential source of anxiety for many students in the classroom. The majority of the students reported that any type of listening activity fueled their anxiety. Sometimes their minds become 'blocked' out of anxiety. Even a few students get so worried about the follow-up activities of listening that they cannot concentrate on the while listening part. One participant stated:

"I start panicking whenever our teacher plays an audio. My mind gets blocked when I do any listening task. I can never write all the answers."

Another student pointed out:

"It is very difficult for me to listen to the audio player. Sometimes I become so fearful that I cannot concentrate on the audio. And, most of the time, I forget all the things that I heard."

5.1.3. Speaking tasks

Speaking is identified as another anxiety-producing factor in the Spanish classroom; specifically, speaking in front of the class causes more stress for the students. In addition, a few students reported that they face difficulties pronouncing some words while speaking. Some of their level of speaking anxiety are so intense that they experience physical anxiety symptoms such as "freezing", "stammering", 'palpitations' and so on. As one student remarked:

"I can understand Spanish, but I stammer while I try to speak it. Some Spanish words are very hard."

Another student stated:

"My legs and hands froze when my teacher told me to speak Spanish in front of the class. I hardly say two or three words."

5.1.4. Negative self-comparison

Students' nature of comparing to others has been identified to generate anxiety. Many students compare themselves to their peers questioning their self-worth, and eventually believe that they are not competent enough and inferior to their peers. One student opined:

"When I see some of my friends are doing well and they understand all the lectures but I can't, it stresses me more."

Another student remarked:

"I find no interest in learning Spanish when I see that my friends get good marks but I cannot. I feel more stressed in this situation."

5.1.5. Fear of negative feedback from the teacher and peers

It has been found that many students feel stressed out for fear of being negatively judged by their teachers and classmates. Consequently, many students kept themselves from participating in the class activities. In this situation, some students go through physical anxiety symptoms such as "freezing," "sweats," and "trembling." Even some students reported that they are also afraid of their peers' judgment, which affects their class performance negatively.

One participant remarked:

"It gives me anxiety when my teachers ask me questions in front of other students."

Another student said:

"If I say something wrong, my teacher will think of me as a bad student. I do not talk most of the time."

The other student stated:

"I think that my friends will judge me on my bad speaking. I try to avoid speaking. If my teacher asks me to say something, I get very anxious and my hands start trembling."

One student commented:

"I become frozen in the exam hall when my teacher stands beside me. I feel my teacher looks at my copy and finds out mistakes."

5.1.6. Writing and Target grammar rules

Many students wrote that writing in Spanish is stressful for them. The target grammar rules pose challenges for the students to write correctly. Few students commented that they could not write in the target language without memorizing. They mostly make mistakes in pronouns and subject-verb agreement.

One student mentioned that:

"Writing long sentences also causes stress for me. I cannot arrange the sentences properly."

Another student remarked,

"I feel bad when I cannot put my thoughts into writing. Also, writing with accurate grammar is a big challenge for me. I can only write when I memorize."

5.2. Teacher's Perspective

5.2.1. Listening activities

Like the students, both of the Spanish teachers asserted that listening activities are the most anxiety-creating element for the students. They reported that many students seemed to have nervousness in the pre-listening part. The teachers try to reduce students' listening anxiety in different ways. T1 stated:

"I noticed students start to panic before playing the tape. It is obvious when they are taking an exam on listening. I make them practice various types of listening activities so that they get used to it."

T2 pointed out:

I think listening to audio is the most challenging part for them. They seem anxious and confused whenever I give them any listening task. Some students even requested that not to give any listening activities. So, I try to make them relaxed by sharing different effective listening techniques.

5.2.2. Previous Language Learning Experience

As a reason for students' anxiety, both teachers stated that students' previous learning experiences can cause anxiety. The teachers extensively discussed that students can experience

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language anxiety if their previous language learning experience is unpleasant. Another teacher added that low achievement in the previous target language can also fuel anxiety among students while learning another foreign language. They stated that as the majority of the students face difficulties in learning English, they develop the idea that they cannot learn any other foreign language.

Broadly, T1 explained:

"Many students have bad experiences learning English; they tend to think learning another foreign language would be difficult for them."

T2 stated:

"These students are learning Spanish as a third foreign language. Before that, they had learned another foreign language, English. After years of studying English, students are not fluent in their English skills. They develop the mindset that language learning is not an easy task. Even so, many of them had bad grades in English, which can affect their learning of another foreign language negatively."

5.2.3. Speaking activities

Teachers also opined that students get anxious doing any type of speaking activity, and most of them try to avoid tasks out of anxiety. Teachers also noticed physical symptoms of speaking anxiety among students. The teachers try to alleviate students' speaking anxiety in different ways.

T1 commented:

The majority of the students are so fearful of speaking. In extreme cases, students stumble and become rigid while speaking. Many try to avoid speaking activities. So, I give lectures in Spanish so that students get the habit of the target language.

T2 remarked:

"Another challenging part is to involve students in a speaking activity. I hardly find any students willing to volunteer for the speaking tasks. More importantly, they started to panic when I told them to present something in front of the class. I try to make the activities interesting and make them do pair or group work so that all the students can participate."

5.2.4. Target Grammar Rules

Both teachers opined that teaching grammar is a matter of difficulty for them. The majority of the students become more fearful when they find a grammatical rule that does not match their mother tongue or their second language. Some students do not concentrate on the lessons or participate in them.

T1 stated:

"I found the majority of the students stressed out whenever I presented a new grammatical topic. And many of them try to avoid the tasks based on grammar. However, I integrate grammatical rules into a speaking activity so that they can use them in real life."

T2 remarked:

"Students do not want to learn grammar. They seem afraid before getting introduced to a new grammar topic. However, if the rule is similar to English, they can catch it easily. In the opposite case, they make many mistakes in the learning process and become stressed. But I make them practice a lot in the classroom so that they can learn it better."

5.2.5. The Role of Teachers and Students' Anxiety

Interesting class activities

The majority of the students remarked that their Spanish teachers reduce anxiety by giving interesting activities. Some students added that the teacher designs the class activities and tasks in pairs or group work, which makes the class enjoyable. Also, the teacher plays Spanish music, which helps the teacher and students build rapport with each other.

One student commented:

"Our Spanish teacher makes our class much more interesting. He gives us pair and group work. We enjoy the class a lot."

Another student stated:

"We are not afraid of our teacher. He is very friendly. He teaches us the lesson by playing music. It helps to reduce our stress."

Accepting students' mistakes

Most of the students brought out the fact that their teacher does not scold them for making mistakes. He responds to students' mistakes without reacting and explains the lesson repeatedly. The teacher carries a supportive attitude towards students' mistakes.

One student stated:

"I make many mistakes in the class, but my teacher never scolded me. This thing reduces my stress level a lot."

Another student remarked:

"I think my Spanish teacher reduces my anxiety. Because, I was always afraid of making mistakes. But when my teacher said "Making mistakes is normal", from that time I felt safe and relaxed in the classroom."

Using body language

Some students stated that their Spanish teacher uses body language when students do not understand the lesson properly. It makes them understand the lesson better and decreases the level of students' anxiety.

One student remarked:

"My teacher never creates anxiety. Rather, he tries to reduce our stress by using body language, playing music, and explaining the topic again and again when we do not understand."

Another student commented:

"Sometimes, I do not understand the lesson. But, my teacher makes us understand by using his body language. It makes the lesson easier to understand."

Teacher's Speech

However, many students also opined that teacher talk creates anxiety in the classroom. When the teachers give lectures in the target language, i.e., Spanish, it increases students' anxiety. They feel more stressed when the teachers' speeches are incomprehensible. Understanding the teacher's lecture turned out to be the major problem faced by students. One student commented:

"Sometimes I do not understand the lecture of my teacher when he uses Spanish, and it is difficult for me to understand the lesson."

Another student remarked,

"My teacher creates anxiety, all the time he speaks and explains everything in Spanish. Very hard to understand as we are beginner learners of Spanish."

The other student opined,

"Our teacher should use English or Bengali along with Spanish because sometimes I do not understand his speech, and it makes me worried."

5. DISCUSSION

The focus of this study was to investigate Spanish learners' language anxiety and the potential sources that instigate their anxiety. Also, the role of a teacher in instigating and reducing students' anxiety is further examined. As revealed by the FLCAS data, Spanish learners experience moderate to low anxiety, and communicative apprehension is rated moderately high in anxiety compared to other constructs. This particular finding highly aligns with the previous studies (e.g., Koch & Terrell, 1991; Price, 1991; Aida, 1994; Gkonou, 2011; Al-Saraj, 2014), where speaking turned out to be the potential source of students' anxiety. However, some studies found that fear of failing exams causes anxiety among students (Gopang et al., 2017; Batiha et al., 2014, as cited in Alico, 2015). It implies that students tend to be more anxious when they are required to give some output, such as speaking or sitting for a test.

The further elaborated responses on the reasons for students' anxiety identify several sources. Among them, both teachers and students identified the same three sources of students' anxiety: listening activities, speaking tasks, and target grammar rules. In a closer view, this particular data implies that listening activities can be as anxiety-inducing as speaking activities because both activities are very time-framed. MacIntyre et al. (1991) and Young (1991) remarked that there is a possibility of increasing pressure on students when they get only one chance to process the input (listening) or output (speaking). Further, negative self-comparison, fear of negative feedback by teachers and peers, and previous bad language learning experiences are also identified as sources of students' anxiety in this study. In concordance with this study, negative self-comparison by Baily (1983), the fear of making errors and the subsequent uneasiness among classmates by Jones (2004), and the fear of evaluation by teachers and poor academic background by Gopang et al. (2017) were found to be sources of anxiety previously.

Upon the inquiry about the relationship between a teacher's behaviour and students' anxiety, the majority of the students state that their Spanish teacher reduces anxiety by giving interesting activities, accepting students' mistakes, and using body language. Accordingly, Atasheneh & Izadi (2012) estimated that a teacher has a significant role in reducing anxiety. However, the current study found teacher talk in the target language to be an anxiety-inducing factor for many students. Young (1991) also reported that teacher talk and communication with teachers can create anxiety. Likewise, Diafri & Wimbari (2018) found a strong correlation between teacher behaviour and students' anxiety. This finding infers that a teacher's behaviour and his or her teaching strategies have the potential to reduce as well as instigate students' anxiety.

In line with the findings, the current study recommends some techniques to mitigate the anxiety of foreign language learners.

- Language teachers should be aware of the existence of students' anxiety in the language learning process. Keeping this in mind, teachers should design their lesson plans and teaching techniques to be supportive of an anxiety-induced classroom.
- Teachers should use students' native language judiciously, as students feel secure if a known language is used in the classroom. Moreover, students' known language facilitates the process of understanding.
- Teachers should design the listening and speaking tasks more interestingly by integrating real-life context, pair or group work, or language games to lower students' fear.
- Teachers should motivate students extrinsically to lower their anxiety. This can be done through a reward system in the form of giving marks on class activities or tokens of appreciation.
- Language teachers should use their non-verbal cues, such as body language, for students' better understanding.
- Teachers should give written feedback to the students so that they don't suffer from uneasiness and threats in front of their peers.
- Instructors should treat making mistakes as essential to the learning process. They should avoid using strategies like immediate error correction since they make students more anxious. Instead, teachers should choose strategies that make students feel less defensive.
- Teachers should make the overall classroom welcoming, nonthreatening, and context-sensitive.

6. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Spanish learners experience a moderate to low level of anxiety for the reasons of listening activities, negative comparison, fear of negative evaluation from teachers and peers, teacher speech in the target language, and previous bad language learning experiences. Further, Spanish teachers' behaviour turned out to be positive, as the teachers helped students reduce anxiety by employing students' favourable instructional practices. This study contributed to filling the gap in the local research context, specifically by involving third-language learners as participants. In addition, by revealing university students' opinions on Spanish language learning as well as their experiences with anxiety, it added to the body of knowledge in language anxiety research. Most importantly, this study has pedagogical implications for language teachers to be well aware of the possible sources of anxiety and the crucial role of teachers in fueling and alleviating students' anxiety

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz et al. (1986)

1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my Spanish language class.
2. I worry about making mistakes in the Spanish class.

3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in Spanish class.
4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the Spanish language
5. It would not bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.
6. During Spanish class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.
7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.
8. I am not usually at ease during tests in my Spanish class.
9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in Spanish classes
10. I worry about the consequences of failing my Spanish language class.
11. I understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes
12. In Spanish class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.
13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my Spanish class
14. I would be nervous speaking the Spanish language with native speakers.
15. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.
16. Even if I am well prepared for Spanish class, I feel anxious about it.
17. I often feel like not going to my Spanish class.
18. I don't feel confident when I speak in Spanish language class.
19. I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.
20. I can feel my heart pounding when I am going to be called on in Spanish classes
21. The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.
22. I feel pressure to prepare very well for Spanish class.
23. I always feel that the other students speak the Spanish language better than I do.
24. I feel very self-conscious about speaking the Spanish language in front of other students.
25. Spanish class moves so quickly that I worry about getting left behind
26. I feel more tense and nervous in my Spanish class than in my other classes.
27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my Spanish class.
28. When I'm on my way to Spanish class, I feel very sure and relaxed.
29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.
30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak the Spanish language.
31. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the Spanish language
32. I wouldn't probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the Spanish language
33. I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions that I haven't prepared in advance.

Appendix 2: Interview questions for the Spanish language learners

- 1) a) What kind of personality do you have?
b) Do you ever feel anxious during Spanish lessons?
- 2) a) What do you think about the activities applied in the classroom?
b) During which activities do you feel anxious?
c) Which activity makes you anxious most?
- 3) Which language does your teacher speak in the classroom? How do you feel when s/he speaks Spanish? How do you feel when s/he speaks Bangla?
- 4) How do you feel when you make a mistake in the lesson?
- 5) a) How do you feel while studying for the Spanish exam?
b) How do you feel during the exam?
- 6) How does the anxiety you feel in the classroom affect your learning Spanish? Why?
- 7) If you were a Spanish teacher, what would you do to reduce the anxiety level of your students?

Appendix 3: Interview Questions for the Teachers

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- 1) How do your students behave in the Spanish classroom?
- 2) What kind of changes do you observe in your students' behaviors when they are anxious? (physical or psychological)
- 3) What factors mostly trigger students' anxiety in the Spanish classroom?
- 4) What do you think the effect of your students' anxiety in the classroom is on their learning Spanish?
- 5) a) During the preparation process for the lesson, do you take into consideration your students' anxiety in the classroom?
b) During the lesson, do you take into consideration your students' anxiety in the classroom? What do you do?
- 6) What do you think other Spanish teachers should do to reduce students' anxiety in the classroom?

Appendix 4: Class Observation Checklist

1. *Medium of instruction :*
2. *Appearance of Teacher:*
3. *Classroom atmosphere :*
4. *Classroom management*
5. *Activities (Group/ pair work):*
6. *Materials (e.g., course book, authentic materials):*
7. *Feedback Techniques:*
8. *Error Correction Techniques:*

Any other comment:

AUTHOR'S BIO

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